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ABSTRACT

These 31 papers illustrate and reflect on the application of autobiographical/life history techniques in research and teaching in higher and adult education institutions in the United Kingdom and from Western and Eastern Europe. The papers are: "Writing and Rewriting Writer Identity" (Aitchison et al.); "In Search of the Meaning of Education" (Antikainen et al.); "Life History in Research Careers" (Blaxter et al.); "Automathsbiographies" (Briggs); "To Become a Researcher" (Bron); "Life History and Personal Values in the Selection and Training of Professionals" (Clifford); "Maths Life Histories" (Cobden, Thumpston); "Using Life Histories on a 'Ways into Work' Course" (Costley, Thompson); "From Chambermaids to Graduates" (Daggett); "Adult Education and Life History" (Davis); "Hidden Histories" (Delfanne); "Biographical Research in Adult Education" (Egger); "New Methods for Life Course Analysis of Students' Lives" (Farnes); "Starting a Personal Profile" (Griffiths); "Histories and Horoscopes" (Hamilton); "Cleaners Tell Their Life Stories" (Harnsten); "An Eighteenth-Century Poet Reveals Himself as an Educator" (Jones); "Narratives and Identity in Higher Education" (Lea); "Secret Worlds of the Way We Talk" (Lewis); "'The Swift Course of My Life'" (Mace); "Hearing Voices, Changing Lives" (Mann); "Life History and Creative Writing" (Michelson); "'Autobiography Unit': A Case Study" (Monaghan); "Life History, Disability, and Special Education" (Potts); "Crossing Cultural Divides" (Preece); "Using Lifelines" (Pryor et al.); "Life History and Motivation for Adult Education" (Schrader-Naef); "Quilting a Life History" (Sellers); "Adult Learning in a Time of Transition" (Shelley); "Accrediting Selves?" (Stuart); "The Importance of Identity and Difference in Relation to the Life Histories of Learners" (Sukhnandan); "Life Histories in a Historical Context" (Thapar); "Women, Education, and Class" (Thomas); "How Did I Get Here? An Account of Routes and Decisions Affecting Entry into and Experiences of Higher Education" (Thombs et al.); "Exploring Educational Life Histories" (Thomson); "Whose Story, Whose Terms? Some Problems of Reflectivity in Life History Research" (West); and "The Influence of Some Life Experiences on the Perceived Value of Action Learning Sets in the Development of Personal and Managerial Skills in a Higher Education Environment" (Williams). (YLB)

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LIFE HISTORIES AND LEARNING

Language, the Self and Education

Papers from
An Interdisciplinary Residential Conference at the
University of Sussex, Brighton, UK
19-21 September 1994

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These papers were compiled by Mary Hoar, Mary Lea, Mary Stuart, Val Swash, Al Thomson and Linden West. However, we bear no responsibility for the views and style of individual papers.

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INTRODUCTION

Language, the Self and Education

'Life can only be understood backwards. In the meantime, it has to be lived forwards'
(Kierkegaard)

These papers have been written for a Conference on Life Histories and Learning at Sussex University in September, 1994 organised under the auspices of the continuing education departments of the Universities of Sussex and Kent in which we work. The papers illustrate and reflect on the application of autobiographical/life history techniques in research and teaching by a diversity of colleagues in higher and adult education institutions in the United Kingdom and from West and Eastern Europe. There is a variety of disciplinary and theoretical perspectives within this writing: culled from psychology, linguistics, sociology, psychoanalysis, literature, history, cultural studies and feminism.

Why a conference at this time and why, given the number and range of papers, such a substantial response to our idea? Research selectivity in the United Kingdom, and similar tendencies elsewhere, may partly explain but, less cynically, the reaction could be an indication of the emergence of a new academic movement.

The evidence of movement is widespread. The *Journal of the British Sociological Association* recently devoted a whole edition to biography and autobiography (Vol 27, No 1, February, 1993) while Inglis has remarked, in the context of cultural studies, that biography is the way people want to tell stories of themselves at this time, capturing something of the historical essence of the period in which we live (Inglis, 1994). There is a strong Life History network within the European Society for Research on the Education of Adults which has generated a diversity of writing, theoretical as well as multi-disciplinary, in the last two years.

These studies reveal a growing application of life history methods within research, training, adult education and community development across Europe. Mader, for example, has detailed the use of autobiography in the training of adult educators in Germany (Mader, 1993). Likewise, there is a mushrooming of interest in autobiographically inspired/life history research and teaching in North America as exemplified in some of the papers at a recent conference of the Canadian Association for the Study of Adult Education (CASAE, 1994). These may be straws in a strengthening wind.

It may be wrong to assume a simple common cause for the movement. The papers from Eastern Europe, at this and ESREA Conferences, reveal distinct nuances in ex-Communist/totalitarian countries which have generated an interest in life and oral history. People are rediscovering or reasserting their own, as well as arguing over collective histories, after years of being silenced by official versions.

There do appear, however, to be some common values informing thinking and practice across the papers. There is, for example, evidence of radical instincts at work in most of the writing for our Conference. While the form, content and disciplinary and theoretical frameworks vary, many appear to echo Edward Thompson's great rallying call to rescue ordinary people - the poor, the defiant, the utopian, the abused, the unconventional, the marginalised - from the *'enormous condescension of history'* (Thompson, 1964); and maybe from conventional social science too. Research has tended to silence and ignore the objects of its 'surveillance' in the language of Foucault; in contrast there is, in these studies, a widespread commitment to giving voice, space, encouragement, in short, to empower those on the margins.

There are other factors at work. We have become more sensitive to the dark side of abstract reasoning, to the dangers of privileging theory above all else: of reducing people, lives, groups, to categories and meta explanations, to totalising tendencies. Inglis has remarked, in reflecting on the nature of biography, that starting with the local and particular can bring out the relevance of the larger but can also reveal where and how it does not fit (Inglis, op.cit.). The nearer to people we are in our research and teaching, the closer to personal histories, to subjectivities, to the complex dialectic of the personal and social, the more unwilling we can become to indulge in a language of universal truth or to claim exclusive insight. We have, on the whole, become justifiably more wary in these post-structuralist times. Celebrating diversity, a plurality of perspectives and the partiality of all knowing is long overdue, if still an undeveloped art within some dominant academic traditions. There are repressed doubts, jagged edges and deep uncertainties within the most polished, celebrated academic texts, as Foucault and others have written (and the same reasoning could be applied to post-modernist theorising too!). One of the great contributions of post-modernist deconstructionism is to focus on what may be missing from or hidden within the text as well as the provisionality of all story telling.

It has become commonplace to observe that we live in a transitional age where old certainties have gone and the methods and epistemologies of science, as a prime product of the enlightenment project, are fiercely contested. Science is but one metaphor, alongside others, for 'knowledging' the world. We are building new metaphors: philosophically, epistemologically, methodologically and ethically in what could become a more democratic, less imperialist culture. But we need to support each other in this enterprise. The papers express something of the struggle for these new, radical and diverse ways, including, crucially, honouring the subjects of research and what they have to say.

There are three clear themes in the papers which we used to structure the Conference programme overall. There is a theme concerned with the theory and practice of the autobiographically reflective practitioner: putting the self of the researcher back into research. The papers (Blaxter et al, Fitzgerald Dagget, Bron, Davies, West, Williams, Clifford) reveal the problems of composing and writing about one's own life history, around for example, the degrees of subjectivity, the range of tones in personal narrative and how subjectivity itself is to be understood and researched. They consider how self, reflection and understanding is an essential component of both personal and professional development.

The second theme - Life Histories, Learning and Identity - includes papers by Lea, Mann, Aitchison/Ivanic/Weldon, Schrader-Naef, Thombs et al, Harnsten, Hamilton, Preece, Thaper, Shelley and Antikainon et al. The focus in most of this work is on the relationship between the stories people tell and senses of self, as well as on the struggle for agency and self and against being authored by social institutions and culture: including education. There are stories of a search to break free from culturally derived constraints as well as to bring different selves and identities into a more integrated and authentic whole.

Likewise the papers offer examples of the empowering, democratic spirit in research: in one instance (Hamilton), engaging participants themselves in the analysis and coding of their own transcripts; in another, Harnsten describes a democratic research circle and its role in facilitating autobiographical understanding and political change among a group of low paid, 'unskilled' workers.

The third theme focuses on the use of life history/autobiographical techniques in teaching and research (Briggs, Cobden and Thumpston, Potts, Monaghan, Sukhnandan, Egger, Farnes, Pryor et al, Jones and Thomas). The disciplinary and theoretical perspectives are remarkably eclectic, including literary studies. Autobiography, in feminist terms, for Thomas, is a healing process, a search for a whole story while, in Jones' account of Falconer, autobiographical poetry is the means to express and explore the depriving effects of sea life on a young and receptive spirit.

More prosaically, there are examples of life history techniques being applied to teaching. In Maths, some of the threat and terror can be removed by sharing maths life histories while autobiography, used at a return to learn level, can evoke new ways of conceptualising what learning and education might be. This is perhaps similar to what C. Wright Mills meant by the capacity and confidence *'to range from the most impersonal and remote transformations to the most intimate features of the human self and to see the relations between the two'* (Mills, 1970). There is a release of the human (and not simply sociological) imagination offering a prospect of linking subjective and social, self and others: past, present and future in a new symbiosis.

The other papers (Sellers, Delfanne, Stuart, Griffiths, Lewis and Thomson) incorporate one or more of these themes while the authors also developed a number of experiential exercises for longer workshop sessions. The messages in this work appear similar to those above. The Assessment of Prior Experiential Learning (APEL), for example, despite radical claims made for it, easily degenerates into educational institutions negatively storying people's lives once more, as schooling and other social institutions have always done, at least for most of the working class and most women. There is a metaphor of life as a quilt (as in the design on our cover) based on the work of Jan Sellers, who uses the image to encapsulate the careers of some women educators. A quilt contrasts with the usual male, linear image of childhood, school and work in clear sequential pattern - sans self, sans child rearing and sans the personal.

We hope that this Conference of different images, diverse backgrounds, nationalities, disciplines, languages and methods will produce new forms of understanding, collaboration and mutual support to take the struggle, in the language of one contributor, for a more human education and research praxis, a significant step forward.

Mary Lea, Mary Stuart, Al Thomson and Linden West

September, 1994

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WRITING AND RE-WRITING WRITER IDENTITY

Mavis Aitchison, Roz Ivanic, and Sue Weldon
Lancaster University

Academic writing is influenced by life-histories. Each word we write represents an encounter, possibly a struggle, between our multiple past experience and the demands of a new context. This struggle implicates our identity: what we write depends on our sense of self and social allegiances up to that moment, and constructs who we become from that moment onwards. In this paper we first introduce ourselves and then explain more about the relationship between life-histories, identities and the act of writing. We illustrate this relationship with two cameos from Mavis's and Sue's experiences of writing as mature students. We then describe the research process whereby we have been studying writer identity, focusing particularly on the fact that we now have three different writings of the same 'stories': tape recorded discussions, Roz writing about Mavis's and Sue's experiences, and Mavis and Sue writing about their own experiences.

About ourselves

We met in 1991. Mavis and Sue met through the Mature Students Society at Lancaster University. They were both in their second year, both among the older mature students, both having to juggle family and other commitments with their new lives as students. In 1991 Roz was beginning to work in earnest on research which would eventually form the basis of her PhD thesis. At that time she only had a very hazy idea of what the PhD would be about, but she knew that it involved getting to know a small number of mature students well, interviewing them about their lives and their writing, and working out how their lives were woven into their writing. She met Sue and Mavis through different networks, and only later found out that they knew each other already. In the last three years we have become more and more part of each others' lives, and are now working together on the project we are describing here.

The relationships between life-histories, identities and writing

There is one driving idea behind our work: the idea that who we are affects how we write. Our life history of experiences, encounters and opportunities, hopes, fears and disappointments, values, beliefs and allegiances, our personality, our anxieties and desires, the tensions and contradictions in our lives, all bear down on the point of the pen.

Writing is not some neutral activity which we just learn like a skill, but it implicates every fibre of the writer's multifaceted being. Subconsciously our writing is affected by who we are, where we are coming from, the individuals and groups we have met and identified with in the past, the sort of person we see ourselves as, our sense of our class, gender, age, ethnicity, sexuality and personality, and the pressure we feel to present ourselves in particular ways. It is important to recognize that all this IS for the most part subconscious: we usually don't realize how this complex web of subjectivity is working on our words. The result is that every person's writing is unique. This is the joy of reading or doing any sort of writing other than copy-typing. On the other hand, it is a hidden snare from the writer's point of view: it is often even more difficult to choose words we feel comfortable with as representations of ourselves than it is to choose the right words to express our ideas. Our examples are from Mavis and Sue's experiences as mature students in their second year.

Mavis: academic gifts

Mavis felt a conflict of identity in her relationship with tutors. They knew far more than she did on their subjects, yet she was older than most of them and was bringing with her the accumulated experience, purpose and excitement for learning built up over so many years. She felt that there were some tutors who not only shared their considerable knowledge with the students, but appeared to value their response. With these people there was a dialogue going on: not just "I'll tell you this, " and "I'll tell you that," but "Because you have told me this, I can now tell you that." But there were other tutors with whom she didn't feel she had a contribution to make. This came out particularly poignantly when she was writing an Anthropology essay entitled 'There is no such thing as a free gift: discuss.' Mavis had very rich experience of gift-giving systems within her family and the community from which she came, and a lot of knowledge about the way people feel about giving blood from her experience in the medical world. Yet Mavis didn't feel any invitation to draw on her own knowledge and experience in the way the assignment was set. She felt that her task was to re-present the ideas of famous anthropologists from books and of her tutors from the lectures. So instead of showing herself to be a person with the experience, knowledge and wisdom of her years, she wrote as a tentative, cautious subordinate to higher authorities. Her life-history had enriched her learning, but the tutor-student relationship had caused her to dismiss it from her writing. Ironically, the topic of the essay itself was 'reciprocity', yet 'reciprocity' was the missing link in her relationship with her tutor on this course.

Sue: dovetailing disciplinary discourses

Sue felt a very different sort of conflict of identity: between different approaches to the same subject. She felt that both within the university and in her own life and personal commitments outside it there were radically different perspectives, and ways of talking and writing. Her life experience made her able to see things from many different points of view. This is, ultimately, an enormous strength, but when grappling with her first long essay it made it very hard for her both to choose what to say and to choose how to say it. A particular example of this was an essay about the disposal of nuclear waste. Sue had, much earlier in her life, studied science, so she knew how scientists talked about such things as radiation. Now she was studying Environmental Ethics in the Philosophy department, where she was learning how to think and write as a philosopher. Between these two experiences of study she had worked as a research assistant for the British Nuclear Fuel Industry for ten years, and more recently had been involved with various environmental pressure groups. While writing the essay she was drawing on the forms of knowledge, beliefs, allegiances, and discourses of all these strands in her experience. No wonder the task of writing it caused her a conflict of identity, and no wonder the result was a cornucopia of discourses.

Writing about writer identity

Mavis's and Sue's stories, and those of seven other mature students like them, are part of an ongoing research project about writer identity. We now have three extremely different versions of the same 'stories' - using the word 'stories' to include both more literally, life-histories, and, in the current academic metaphor, 'theoretical explanations'.

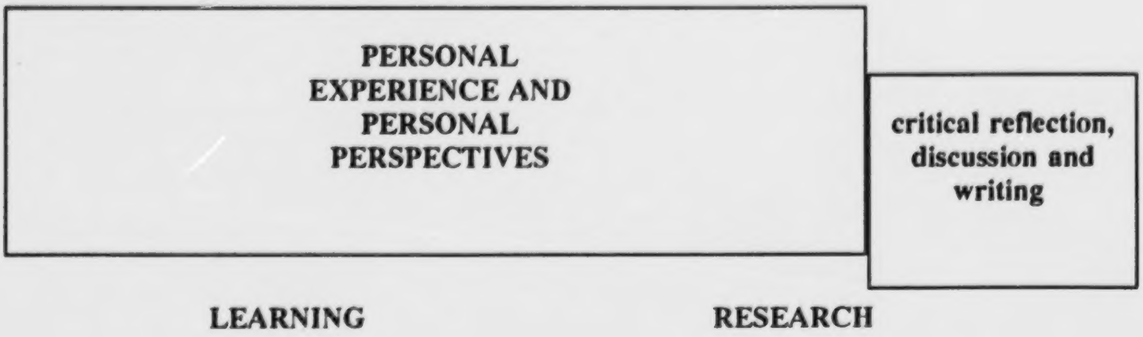
Roz chose the topic of writer identity for her PhD research. In order to develop a 'theory of writer identity' she talked to Mavis and Sue (and the others) extensively about their lives, about one particular piece of writing for each person, about their feelings and dilemmas associated with those pieces of writing. We met many times in each others' homes and in Roz's office, talked with and without a tape recorder, talked on the phone. The theoretical understanding evolved from those meetings and discussions: they belonged just as much to Mavis and Sue as they did to Roz, even though Roz initiated the research project. After all, the theoretical understanding was grounded in Mavis and Sue's experiences and their tellings of them, not in Roz's. The first 'writing' of the developing ideas was all the jointly constructed dialogues, some on tape and most disappeared into thin air but with traces in our heads.

The second 'writing' of these ideas was when Roz wrote her thesis which included biographies of the students, including Mavis and Sue, agreed by them but composed by her on the basis of the recorded and unrecorded conversations. In this she was writing about the students in the third person, interspersing her reports of their life-histories and experiences of writing with some direct quotations from tapes, set off from the rest of the text by lines, insetting and a different typeface. So Mavis's and Sue's own words were being treated as 'data' and 'evidence' for what Roz was claiming - standard 'qualitative research' stuff.

Since then, Sue, Mavis and others have been re-writing the same material, drawing on Roz's account and analysis in order to explore the same issues from their own perspective, using 'I'. This third writing is very different from the second in other ways too. The articles are not written for examiners: they are written mainly for other students to read, to help future mature students to understand the dilemmas caused by the relationships between experience, identity and writing. Each article concentrates on a single, whole person and one issue which was significant for her, rather than trying to generalize and be comprehensive. Mavis and Sue are finding that, when they write their own 'stories', they choose different aspects of their life histories from what they originally told Roz, they emphasize different events, relationships and ideas, and they choose very different words. We are aiming to produce a book which contains eight or nine such stories.

Life-histories, learning and research

We think that working in this way contributes both to research and to learning, with 'writing and telling' as the medium which is central to both. We don't want to make a hard-and-fast distinction between 'learning' and 'research', since they seem to us to be the public and private face of the same thing, but we will write about them separately in order to make some particular observations.


PERSONAL EXPERIENCE AND PERSONAL PERSPECTIVES
critical reflection, discussion and writing
LEARNING
RESEARCH

Firstly, critical reflection on their experience contributes to learning because it helps people to gain control over their lives. This is, we think, a generally understood role of life-history work in education. In our project, we have all begun to feel more confident about writing thinking, talking and eventually writing about the way in which our lives and our identities are woven into our writing.

Secondly, theoretical understandings are built on people's experiences and perspectives. In traditional quantitative research, aspects of people's experience, attitudes and opinions have been measured and quantified by researchers. In traditional qualitative research, people's experience and perspectives have been explored in greater detail, and the rich complexity of them has been re-presented by researchers, as in 'the second writing' we described above. In our current project we are claiming that when people critically reflect on their own experiences in some systematic way, and communicate their understandings more broadly by writing about them, this is also a form of research. It may be that a single story like this would not make a big contribution to research: it would be yet another autobiography with a particular slant - interesting reading, but hardly pushing forward the frontiers of knowledge and understanding. But we think that a book which contains several personal accounts which all explore the same theme - in our case, the relationship between life-histories, identity and writing - will not only make interesting reading for people sharing similar experiences, but will also make a powerful contribution to understanding of the more abstract issues - a type of understanding which moves beyond traditional qualitative research. We are incorporating some of the principles of community publishing into research, and thereby foregrounding a function community publishing has always had of contributing to research. These principles are, firstly, that 'who feels it knows it' - people who have the experience are the ones who understand it and are the best ones to write about it for publication; and secondly that knowledge, ideas and understandings are not for an exclusive elite, but should be accessible to all.

IN SEARCH OF THE MEANING OF EDUCATION: LIFE-COURSE, GENERATIONS AND EDUCATION IN CONTEMPORARY FINLAND

Ari Antikainen, Jarmo Houtsonen, Hannu Huotelin & Juha Kauppila
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What is the meaning of Education?

In the research project "In Search of the Meaning of Education", we are studying the meaning of education and learning in the lives of Finns (Antikainen 1991). In addition to formal education, we are interested in adult education and other less formal ways of acquiring knowledge and skills. Our conception of meaning refers both to our method and theory.

We are investigating intersubjective social reality by means of a qualitative logic, not of statistical representativeness. We are using a life-history approach with a life-story interview as our method (Huotelin 1992). According to our theory, the meaning of education can be analysed on three levels, as the following three questions:

1. How do people use education in constructing their life-courses?
2. What do educational and learning experiences mean in the production and formation of individual and group identity?
3. Our project's very first life story was that of a 66-year-old woman, Anna. We noted that her life organised itself as a series of key learning experiences (Antikainen 1993). These experiences, which in the light of superficial examination seem to have organised the narrator's life course or to have changed or strengthened her identity, we have called significant learning experiences. We can thus ask what sort of significant learning experiences Finns have in the different stages of their lives. Do those experiences originate in school, work, adult study or leisure-time pursuits? What is the substance, form and social context of significant learning experiences?

Data and Method

We collected our data by means of biographical and thematic interviews. In the initial interviews the interviewees related their life stories orally. As needed, each interviewee was also posed more specific questions about education, self-definition, and areas of knowledge important in his or her life. An interview typically lasted three to four hours, although the duration ranged from one to six hours. We then picked out a list of significant learning experiences from each life story and presented it to the interviewee to be accepted or changed.

In the second interview we considered each significant learning experience and its social and biographical context in greater detail. Assuming that education can also destroy identity, we asked, finally, for the interviewee's most negative education-related experience. The second interview usually lasted about as long as the first did.

In accordance with our purpose, we interviewed many kinds of people: women and men, representatives of different social classes and ethnic groups, and persons of various ages. Most of the 44 interviewees were Finnish speakers (n=28), but the group also included Swedish-speakers, Lapps, Romanies and members of immigrant and refugee groups. The interviews with members of ethnic minorities were on average less complete than those conducted with Finnish speakers. Beforehand, we classified those to be interviewed into four age groups or cohorts whose representation we thus wished to guarantee. In accordance with our grounded-theory approach, we ended the collection of the data when we reached the saturation criterion.

We are pleased with our material in that most of the life stories seemed complete and openly presented. Two so-called public figures - not genuine celebrities, however - represented an exception. Each of them gave us a very official-sounding, formal life story, resembling a curriculum vitae. Since both of them were already retired, and had not to our knowledge "lost face" in that context, we can interpret their public selves as having prevented - if not stigmatised - the presentation of a personal, openly expressed life story.

The Educational Generations

In recent decades Finnish society, and education as a part of that society, have changed swiftly. By the concept of generation we were able to examine the processes by which historical and social time shape the individual's life-course (Mannheim 1952). A generation consists of group of people born during the same period of time and united by similar life experiences and a chronologically coherent cultural background. In the present study we have been looking for Finnish educational generations. At this stage of the analysis, ethnic minorities are not involved (Kauppila 1991; Huotelin & Kauppila 1994). Diagram 1, below, outlines the course and outcome of our analysis.

We classified the data according to the following educational cohorts, on the basis of the structure of opportunities - that is, on changes in social mobility, in the educational system and in participation in education (cf. Pöntinen 1982; Roos 1987; Järvelä 1992):

1. Cohort with little education (persons born before 1936)
2. Cohort of educational growth and inequality (persons born in the years 1936-1945)
3. Cohort of educational growth and welfare (persons born in the years 1946-1965)
4. Cohort of young people (persons born after 1965).

By applying the life-course perspective to the data thus classified into cohorts, we attempted to clarify the experiential base of the education, as well as education-related actions in the various stages of life. From this perspective we were able to take note of the individual's actions under specified sociohistorical conditions. (Huotelin & Kauppila 1994).

On the basis of this very intensive reading of the life stories we found the following core-categories of education and life-course, corresponding to the educational cohorts:

1. Education as an ideal, life as a struggle
2. Education as a means to an end, work as the substance of life
3. Education as a commodity, the self as a problem
4. Education as self-evident, personal pursuits as the substance of life.

Experiences of youth and young adulthood have created, for each generation, its own generational position as regards education as an ideal, a means to an end, a commodity or a matter of course. This also appears to elucidate school-related motivation and orientation, and the stream of development from ideal to matter of course. The educational motivation pertaining to the generational position is a passive state, encompassing opportunities which can be realised, be stifled, merge with social forces or reappear in new form (cf. Mannheim 1952). The motivation does however reveal a readiness to react to education. The meaning of education has been constructed in the context of major changes in Finnish society. These contexts include World War II and the post-war reconstruction, the structural change of the 1960s and 70s (the so-called great migration), and the development of the welfare state. We can thus name the actual, experiential educational generations as follows (Huotelin & Kauppila 1994):

1. Generation of war and scant education (born before 1936, approximately)

2. Generation of structural change and increasing educational opportunities (born in the years 1936-1955, approximately)
3. Generation of social welfare and diverse educational choices (born after 1955, approximately)

It should be borne in mind that our examination is taking place solely at the level of generational position. A common generational position does not however imply a unified actualised generation. A social change does not take place simultaneously in the city and the countryside, or in different social classes, for example. Within a single generational position there may be numerous generational groups. Nevertheless, the aforementioned generations differ clearly from one another, for example in terms of negative educational experiences.

The negative educational experiences mentioned by the oldest generation were associated with the lack or inaccessibility of education, the interruption of schooling, or such personal experiences as a strict or mean teacher. Only when we come to the younger half of the middle generation do we find the most widespread negative experience to be boredom with school attendance. In all cases, these boring places included secondary school and intermediate school (or, in later years, the upper level of comprehensive school). Among the young people, the spectrum of negative experiences was even broader (Antikainen & Houtsonen 1994).

The results of the generational analysis can also be summarised by stating that the changes in the experienced, subjective meaning of education have not paralleled the growth of education's objective, institutional meaning. At the same time as the significance of education has grown vastly - for example in seeking employment, in professional activity or in coping with life in general - going to school has for more and more people become meaningless and boring.

Many explanations or interpretations might be found for this change in the subjective meaning. The simple prolongation of education does not explain the matter, since education was an ideal even for members of the oldest generation who had received most extended education. Second, a partial explanation for the change may be found in the change in education's status in distribution of knowledge - the "loss of monopoly" - and in the inflation of degrees - the "educational inflation" - which developed as the increase in the number of educated persons outstripped the expansion of the job market. The subjective meaning of education began to crumble first among members of the middle generation, even although their professional careers were by no means being obstructed. A third explanation is associated with the institutionalisation of life-course and with the role of education in that process (Kohli 1985; Meyer 1987; Buchmann 1989, Dannefer 1991; Lindroos 1993).

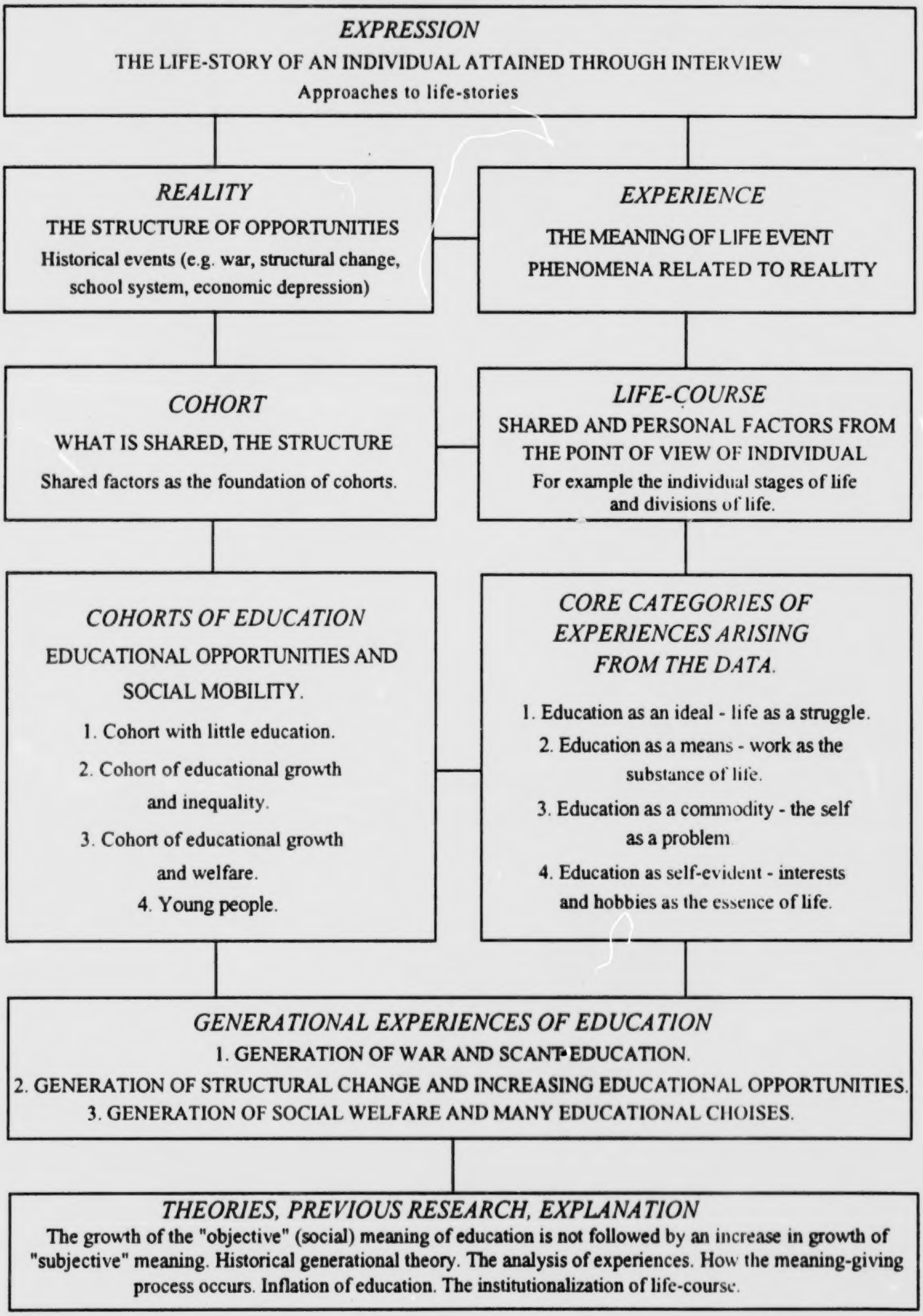
Modernity has meant the standardisation of products, culture, social organisation and human life itself. Increasingly, one's life-course proceeds in accordance with formal rules. At the same time, life has become more individualised - we function by making our own individual choices. The dynamic of these two seemingly opposite developments has institutionalised life-course: the "self" - the individual's life-course - has become an institution. We all make our own choices, but in a very similar way or within specified boundaries.

Education and the student or pupil's role are assigned to a certain age group. Schooling which proceeds "normally" produces no significant experiences.

Age-related norms and roles have in recent years weakened in modern society, but in our educational life-stories this development is not apparent. Unless this collapse of age-related norms and roles outside of school has contributed to the feeling that school is unimportant.

DIAGRAM 1.

Towards generational experiences of education.



EXPRESSION
THE LIFE-STORY OF AN INDIVIDUAL ATTAINED THROUGH INTERVIEW
Approaches to life-stories

REALITY
THE STRUCTURE OF OPPORTUNITIES
Historical events (e.g. war, structural change, school system, economic depression)

EXPERIENCE
THE MEANING OF LIFE EVENT
PHENOMENA RELATED TO REALITY

COHORT
WHAT IS SHARED, THE STRUCTURE
Shared factors as the foundation of cohorts.

LIFE-COURSE
SHARED AND PERSONAL FACTORS FROM THE POINT OF VIEW OF INDIVIDUAL
For example the individual stages of life and divisions of life.

COHORTS OF EDUCATION
EDUCATIONAL OPPORTUNITIES AND SOCIAL MOBILITY.

1. Cohort with little education.
2. Cohort of educational growth and inequality.
3. Cohort of educational growth and welfare.
4. Young people.

CORE CATEGORIES OF EXPERIENCES ARISING FROM THE DATA.

1. Education as an ideal - life as a struggle.
2. Education as a means - work as the substance of life.
3. Education as a commodity - the self as a problem.
4. Education as self-evident - interests and hobbies as the essence of life.

GENERATIONAL EXPERIENCES OF EDUCATION

1. GENERATION OF WAR AND SCANT EDUCATION.
2. GENERATION OF STRUCTURAL CHANGE AND INCREASING EDUCATIONAL OPPORTUNITIES.
3. GENERATION OF SOCIAL WELFARE AND MANY EDUCATIONAL CHOISES.

THEORIES, PREVIOUS RESEARCH, EXPLANATION
The growth of the "objective" (social) meaning of education is not followed by an increase in growth of "subjective" meaning. Historical generational theory. The analysis of experiences. How the meaning-giving process occurs. Inflation of education. The institutionalization of life-course.

Education and Identity

In telling their life stories, people express and explain themselves. Indeed, within the boundaries indicated by an interview situation, the interviewee uses cultural resources to create a theory or picture of him- or herself (Houtsonen 1991; Antikainen & Houtsonen 1994).

According to our working definition, a person's identity is composed of the meaningful parts of his or her life story (Antikainen 1991, 6). Identity is the individual's socially constructed definition, formulated by using available cultural meanings. The person's identity can exist only through the system of linguistic and cultural codes which people use in defining their identities as objects (Weigert et al. 1986, 30-36).

Culture is a symbolic structure of meaning and a system of distinctions which helps people to classify and interpret themselves and others. The structure of meaning governs the classifications and interpretations that we make, but not in detail (Sulkunen 1992, 184-202). Everyone is forced to formulate a unique identity from the resources offered by the shared cultural structure of meaning. Thus, while completely social in its construction, identity is at the same time uniquely personal.

We may define identity as the typified self in each stage of the life-course, in the context of social relationships. Through the typification process the identity is termed a meaningful social object. Typification is a conceptual process which helps people to organise their information concerning the world. The organising takes place on the strength of the typical features - rather than the unique characteristics - of people, things and events (Starr 1983, 162).

By shedding light on these typifications of the self we are attempting to make Finnish culture visible as regards the construction of educational identity. We have distinguished among four dimensions or manifestations of identity: social identity ("objective"), personal identity ("biographical"), self-identity ("feeling of identity") and cultural identity ("meaningfulness"). Of these four, the first three correspond to the definition used by Goffman (1963).

Education and social identity

In examining what sort of social identity education produces, we are asking, what sort of producer of social status is education? What does a diploma mean when one is looking for a job? What skills does education produce?

In all the generations, education produced social status either directly or via a vocation or profession. The younger the generation, the less a degree or vocational certification tended to create status directly. Vocational or academic education was perceived as an irreplaceable producer of the basic or theoretical skills needed in working life. All the same, representatives of the oldest, little-educated generation acquired their knowledge and skills through self-training, primarily in agriculture. For the young people, summer jobs and personal pastimes were important sources of knowledge and skills. Especially those members of this generation who were receiving vocational education stressed that "real skills" are learned in practical working life, while education primarily offers "theory" (Antikainen & Houtsonen 1994).

Education and personal identity

We examined the relationship between education and personal identity on the basis of three questions: with what stage of the life-course is the education associated? What is the education's meaning in the life-course as a whole? How does the individual react to education and what are the main educational experiences like?

For most of the interviewees, the timing of their education followed a cultural script typical to their generation, gender and social class. Vocational courses, vocational school, college or university-level education followed immediately upon completion of either compulsory schooling or academic secondary school. Some other sorts of scripts did however come to light. For example, some of the interviewees sought education later in life, to get new jobs. Internal or external constraints led these interviewees in that direction. The external constraint may for example have been illness or the death of a close relative, whereas the internal constraint or challenge may have been a desire for social advancement or meaningful work.

The meaning of vocational education following basic schooling varied from generation to generation. For the oldest generation vocational education meant a way to cope with life's difficulties; for the middle generation, a vocation, a career, and social advancement; for the youngest generation, often, the realisation of a personal dream. The same trend seemed to prevail when we examined the meaning of education in terms of educational level. A vocational course after basic schooling was linked to the need to cope with life's difficulties; an advanced university education to the fulfilment of a personal hope or dream. By the "personal dreams" of the youngest generation we refer to matters related to personal values or lifestyles, such as creativity, ecological consciousness or sexual marginality.

As noted earlier, this generational change in the subjective meaning of education was thus connected to a change in the overall themes of the life stories. By the same token, in our examination of educational generations we noted how primary educational experiences have changed. Representatives of the oldest generation respected education in general, although they did not depict their own time spent in compulsory school attendance as at all pleasant. Representatives of the youngest generation found secondary school and the upper forms of comprehensive school (or the former intermediate school) boring, tiring and oppressive. Regardless of the generation, the most favourable experiences were linked to personal relationships and friendships developed in school. In like fashion the absence of such relationships was viewed very negatively (Antikainen & Houtsonen 1994).

Education and self-identity

We investigated the relation of education to self-identity in the light of three questions: what is the interviewee's assessment of his or her educational status? What sort of image of oneself as a pupil or student does education produce? Have the interviewees acquired through their schooling knowledge, skills, attitudes or personality traits which they consider part of a self-concept?

Lack of education seemed to bother men of the oldest, limited-education generation, but it did not to any extent bother women of that generation. The young people seem in particular to see themselves as either "practical" or "literate" in their orientation. The upper level of comprehensive school - and, sometimes, secondary school - were pictured as boring, confining and old-fashioned, while the interviewee's self was depicted as "nice", "free" or "creative". Very seldom did an interview include a self-definition as a pupil, for example as a "good", "average" or "poor" pupil, but an explanation for so few cases could be sensitiveness of these definitions in Finnish society. Certain interviewees said that education had instilled in them such characteristics as "creativity", "leadership", "empathy" and "self-confidence" (Antikainen & Houtsonen 1994).

Education and cultural identity

Our observations on cultural identity are very tentative: the analysis is continuing. Education often seems to be associated with the continuation of the culture, lifestyle and values represented by the family, but the data also reveal some "defections" over the borders of cultural and social structures. Changes of vocation or profession during adulthood, as mentioned earlier, and the striving of many Lapps to master the Finnish language and culture furnish examples.

Significant Learning Experiences

In the context of a life story, we defined as significant learning experiences those learning experiences which appeared to guide the interviewee's life-course or to have changed or strengthened his or her identity (Antikainen 1991). It makes sense to assume that a possible change in identity concerns secondary areas or the person's relationship to his or her identity, rather than the core of identity - if in fact such a thing even exists.

In terms of the experience's duration, two types of significant learning experiences came to light in our research: clearly definable events and vaguer, cumulative experiences such as the development of self-awareness as an outgrowth of certain events related by the interviewee. In our pilot study we coded, in a very theoretical and thus largely deductive way, five cases which represented all four educational cohorts (Antikainen et al. 1992 and 1993). Some observations from the pilot study follow.

As early as the 1930s, Dewey (1938) stated that the quality and continuity of experiences constituted key factors in learning and human development. Our data likewise provide a picture of how a significant learning experience gives a person strength to cope with future problems. Without knowing of the powerful, antecedent significant learning experiences involved, it would for example be difficult to imagine what might motivate Anna, a 66-year-old woman living in a rural village, to learn a foreign language for the first time at her advanced age, in spite of her relatives' negative view of the matter (Antikainen 1993); or to conceive of Ville, a 50-year-old employed as a building contractor, continually taking university studies or night-school classes (Antikainen 1993 a, 132).

The oldest generation's experiences were in general more numerous and intensive than those of the younger generations. We can interpretate this difference firstly by the retrospectiveness of the educational setting and secondly by maturation, but a genuine generation gap also exists, and plays a role here. Reference should also be made to the increasing role of the media and to the aforementioned institutionalisation of life-course.

In our pilot study we examined the situations which led to significant learning experiences in terms of where and in how formal an environment the learning had taken place (Jarvis 1987). We first noted the variety of such situations. Nonetheless, not one interviewee had had a single significant learning experience solely in a pupil's role in a school attended on a compulsory basis. On the other hand, school learning may be involved, along with other environments, in longer-term, cumulative experiences of the sort mentioned earlier. Once again we might refer to the institutionalisation of life-course: learning to read before one reaches school age may constitute a significant learning experience, but when one learns to read in school the accomplishment is nothing special, and therefore does not appear in the life story.

With all the significant learning experiences we examined, it was easy to uncover the personal relationships connected to learning - the significant others, as we call them. Even in our highly technological society learning can thus be described and analysed in terms of concrete personal relationships - even those outside of formal education. Our results to date indicate that personal relationships involved in significant learning experiences are to a surprising extent respectful or egalitarian.

We attempted to examine learning interests (in the sense of advantages to be protected) and the reflectivity of the learning experience by applying the ideas of Mezirow (1981). Our preliminary results indicate that, in significant learning experiences, a learning interest may be varied in nature and may often be far more technical and instrumental than we had assumed beforehand. Even a very technical learning interest may thus later lead to studies to be definable as practical or emancipating.

Reflectivity in fact forms an integral part of the definition of a significant learning experience. In our preliminary investigation it was not possible to classify the level of reflectivity unambiguously. Most generally, significant learning experiences represented reflective learning of skills. In some of the women's life stories - e.g. that of Mervi, a 39-year-old working as a teacher (Antikainen et al. 1993, 23-24) - care of close relatives and living via close relatives played such a role that these life stories were clearly distinct from the others in terms of self-reflection.

Our analysis thus far indicates that, for representatives of the oldest generation, the typical context of the significant learning experience is a situation we refer to as a constraining situation, which demands new ways of action and thought. Taken literally, the term may be an exaggeration; "demanding challenge" might be more descriptive, since the interviewees reacted to such situations as challenges which included possibilities for choice. For the young people, the first typical context is the pastime and hobbies; the next is self-definition and the search for identity. We have not as yet adequately analysed the extent to which learning experiences vary according to gender, social class or cultural membership.

Unemployment and Widowhood

Our material includes the life stories and thematic interviews of two very different widows. Both told of the meaning of education, but in different ways.

Manta is an 80-year-old Lappish woman, a war widow. Her resources for coping with a widow's life situation have consisted of skills acquired from Lappish culture and occupations on the one hand and, on the other, a Finnish-language education. The former provided a basis for managing in life, but the latter was also important. The skills provided by the Finnish-language schooling helped her to handle her affairs with the bureaucracy independently and understand social issues. The fact that school attendance and the literacy it brought with it were not at that time common among Lappish women also gave her self-confidence. Education and Lappish culture also came together in the learning of "fine" (i.e. Finnish) handicrafts in a domestic-science school. Manta has thus made successful use of the cultural resources which have been available to her (Houtsonen 1993).

Pirjo, 27, got a business education. She worked with her newlywed husband as a fur-farming entrepreneur until he died suddenly. In her story and interview, studying to become a nurse constituted not simply an important resource but also a clearly positive redefinition of her self. The case struck us as exceptional until we acquainted ourselves with the literature on widowhood. According to Lopota (1979; 1980), education has a crucial meaning in shaping the widow's socio-economic position and lifestyle. Once the mourning is over, the best-educated widows experience a positive change in themselves (see Tuominen 1994, 29-30). In a modern society Pirjo's case is thus typical.

In the examination of unemployment we are still only finding our bearings. The unemployed are most often people with relatively low status and little education. Admittedly, another sort of life-course model is also becoming more general among young people. Study, working life and retirement are no longer the separate, consecutive life-stages they once were;

rather, according to Viinamäki (1994), periods of work, study and even unemployment now belong to the normal labour-market life-course, to a sort of "permanent temporariness".

Education plays a role in the decision whether or not to take a new job, in "storing" workers, and in prolonging the "activeness" of the unemployed person. In seeking a job or education, Finns first direct their attention to the local market, and then primarily to the Helsinki region.

Creativity and Participation - Are they There?

The concept of the significant learning experience was based on observations and interpretations made regarding the first life story.

What then does a significant learning experience represent? It is first a certain sort of life event. This is clearly a question of a change-event, not of institutionalised life-course (cf. Schütze 1981, per Lindroos 1993, 61-68). The result of the event may be an output classifiable as a creative achievement, most frequently the specific result of work or activity, or a meaning which is new from the agent's standpoint (Häyrynen 1984). In any case significant learning experiences represent a future orientation, or at least the reconstruction of a personal future.

Of concepts more sociologically attuned than creativity, Antikainen has in this connection sampled that of empowerment. The core of the empowerment concept is a participatory approach (cf. Pieterse 1992, 10-11). The concept thus touches on both the individual's self-definition and his or her participation, as a result of which even the social structures of subordination may change.

In our research plan we represented three factors which, alone or together, could serve as indicators of empowerment: the expansion of world-view or cultural understanding, the strengthening of one's "voice" so that he or she is encouraged to participate in dialogue or even break down the dominant discursive forms, and the broadening of the field of social identities and roles (Antikainen 1991, 5; Livingstone 1987).

As examples of experiences whose character should be distinguished in this light, we might select at least the following:

- In the middle and older generations of men, Unto (66) and Ville (50) both exemplified a clear broadening of the scope of social and cultural identities. Physical sickness or disability obliged both to leave the countryside for the city, to give up physical labour for intellectual work. In their own assessments and that of the outside researcher, both men were able to utilise available cultural resources successfully. In Unto's case these resources included an enlightenment and in Ville's a vocational education. Naturally, their life-courses in large measure also manifested their adaptation to structural change.
- Manta's and Pirjo's triumphs over the difficulties of widowhood have already been discussed.
- On the basis of our pilot study, for Lappish activists of the middle or youngest generation, such as 30-year-old Juuso, the life-course includes getting to know Finnish culture and managing in a Finnish cultural environment, before setting out to advocate one's own minority-group issues. We should however note that, as yet, our analysis of the painful school and dormitory experiences undergone by Lapps remains quite inadequate.
- Especially among women of the middle and youngest generations, a familiarity with a foreign language and culture would appear to signify a clear expansion of world

view and cultural identity. Mervi (39) and Taru (20), from our pilot study, serve as examples.

A social movement and the story or utopia it represents can be considered sources or nurturers of personal creativity and empowerment. It should at the same time be remembered that social movements and their histories also began with personal action. The interviews included references to certain histories of this sort. With members of the oldest generation, at least the story of popular and adult education came up. The youngest generation's perspective might be characterised by saying that the world and the self were no longer examined so much from the standpoint of school ; rather, school was examined from the standpoint of the world and the self (cf. Hoikkala 1993). According to our tentative interpretation, certain young people were thus seeking education which would have something to offer for their participation in such things as the ecology or woman's movement, or for a corresponding personal lifestyle.

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LIFE HISTORY IN RESEARCH CAREERS

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Introduction

In what ways do we as women researchers and teachers - contracted, marginalised, temporary and peripheral - make the connections which are required both for our own self-worth, status and future employment prospects? Can drawing on aspects of our biography (both in retrospect and perhaps in prospect), enable this process to occur. And, importantly, what do we have to learn to enable this process to happen? Using elements of our own biographies, these are the themes of this paper.

In the selection of our histories, we have chosen to focus on three issues. Firstly, we wish to demonstrate an understanding of the way in which we have each sought to make connections within our biography and ask: has this enabled us to manage and cope with changes of employment and periods of unemployment? Secondly, we want to consider the relationship between our biography and research and teaching. The ways in which we might identify personally with elements in this process and how this engagement might shape our future identities. Finally, we wish to consider the ways in which we may be employed as teachers or researchers on the basis of an assumed identification with a subject and through the ways in which those we work with, including students and research respondents, may seek to identify with aspects of our biographies.

The rest of the paper draws on our personal accounts in response to these three themes. These accounts in their turn draw on the themes foremost in our minds at the time we starting writing in June 1994 and reflect the current creation of our lives as "work in progress".

Using our lives flexibly: Biography and career changes

The two accounts which follow indicate, however, the nature of that 'search for self' as a learning process. In trying to draw together a disparate set of research and teaching posts, undertaken particularly across the years of responsibility for child care, both Christina and Loraine are conscious of the need to have a clear academic identity which gives cognisance to perceptions that professional academics have specialist knowledge. Yet, in addition to this need for an externalisation of their careers, within their accounts is also a sense of having to find common themes which will enable them to manage the changing nature of intellectual demands placed upon them. For Christina, this is accomplished through a sense of identity which draws upon research skills and gender analysis. Her account indicates that learning to understand how intellectual life develops core skills and concepts has been significant in helping her to make connections:

> **In my paid working life I have worked on a variety of research projects and taught across a range of courses. I have therefore had to understand issues about stepfamilies, psychotherapy, health, poverty, early years education, postgraduate education and now continuing education and human resource development. It can be quite unnerving having to appear as the 'expert' in all these things and at times trying to keep it all together has been very difficult. I know that what has helped me a lot is a sense of identity as a researcher. Doing research has given me skills which have enabled me to travel into new fields of enquiry, often at very short notice. Knowing that you can find out information quickly, you can handle lots of data and cope with that sense of having to get yourself up to scratch. I don't think the skill based nature of academic work is acknowledged enough and it is something I myself had to learn. But also I've used gender a lot as a conceptual and theoretical constant in all of my work. I've used feminism as a major lens with which I interpret material or draw on for teaching. It is not bounded in the sense that an academic discipline might be. In that way, therefore, it has been so good for me to make connections.**

In Loraine's words we find that her learning was in terms of having to reclassify activities for a particular audience of employers when she wanted to return to full-time paid work. She had identified the very real need to appear as an 'insider' if she was to be successful:

> **Before I could re-enter the full-time labour market I had to learn how to turn ten years of part-time or temporary jobs and community-based political activity into skills and knowledge and coherence and with a marketable optimism. I learned - with more than a little bit of help from my (feminist) friends. Part of what I learned was how to reclassify activities into some unifying themes and practising this up-beat version of myself. I re-composed an identity for a continuing education audience and drew on the language of a discipline (social anthropology) and of contemporary policy type documents.**
>
> **The reasons why I needed friends to assist me in presenting myself as coherent to an employer audence was that, in common with most people in part-time or temporary work, that place in an employing organisation was cut off for me from policy and the language, the buzz words that identify an insider. Without the language I could not present as a "natural" for membership of the organisation.**

Connecting the self and work: in research and teaching

We have each experienced in many different instants the ways in which engagement with research has connected to our lives. Christina's PhD is one example where her career path as a stepmother led her to decide to focus on the stepfamily as a research topic for postgraduate work (Hughes, 1991). In such a way, where there are opportunities to choose, we should always ask of research 'To what extent does this reflect personal interests?'. In these cases the outcomes and processes of research can indeed be a direct reflection of one's own biography.

In thinking autobiographically about how we put ourselves into practice we found most interesting the way that engagement with research and teaching also contributed to our own biographies. In what ways has this experience affected us as individuals? As Tessa's and Loraine's accounts will indicate, we experienced this as a learning process where the job we were undertaking contributed to our own self-development. Loraine's words indicate this in terms of the ways in which hearing the language and metaphor of the researched has enabled her to think about her own life in these ways:

> **The language I use to think about my life has been gathered in part from listening, in research interviews, to other people talking about education and employment in their lives. My attention has focussed on two aspects of the life history vocabulary - one associated with movement across land and the other with water. The first is a vocabularly of 'pathways', 'road/routes' and 'tracks' through social institutions. And particular ways of relating to these socially expected (and man-made) socially constructed careers - 'keeping on' (the track), 'wandering off', 'plodding', 'climbing' or 'making progress'.**
>
> **The contrastic metaphor of water is not of the expected, or anticipated but of being carried along, 'going with the flow' (Blaxter and Tight, 1993), 'drifting' or being 'emersed' or 'submerged' in social milieux.**
>
> **By reviewing my own life history with these metaphors it seems to me that the selection and use of these intimate a relationship between self, self-esteem, the events of life history, and institutionalised careers. They are used quite frequently in interviews and, I would suggest, are so common that most people can generate more.**

Whilst Loraine's account indicates the positive nature of learning from others, in Tessa's case at times such learning was not always welcomed as a contribution to her developing self. Her account indicates the ways in which biography is seen to provide a common basis and a facilitator in connecting to others. This simplistic notion, as Tessa so powerfully says, can leave a sense of unease:

> **Disability voice is a research project which attempts to give voice to people with disabilities. Undertaking this work brought up issues of personal identity. Interviewing people with a range of disabilities, often quite severe, was at times quite disturbing. The onset of Multiple Sclerosis three years ago has left me with mild difficiulties, including walking long distances, fatigue and bladder weakness. This is compounded by brief periods of deterioration (attacks) which I generally recover fully from. Consequently I am to some extent in and out of disability, half way between the 'disabled' and able bodied.**
>
> **The research I was involved in focussed on the common identity of those with disabilities. Yet sometimes I felt somewhat of a fraud claiming commonality with some of the participants, especially when they stated 'of course you'll know what I mean'. I felt uncomfortable with this sense of solidarity, because the obstacles I have to cope with don't really seem to**

> **compare, they are not on the same level. This solidarity, however, was precisely the vehicle used to gain access and credibility.**
>
> **This then leads to other concerns. Feelings of not having come to terms with disability/illness, both of my own and of others. My immediate reaction to interviewees in the situations described was 'I'm not like you'. This therefore made me question the extent of my empathy, which was the reason used for my involvement in the research.**

Constructing biographies: the external influence

In discussing our biographies it became clear that we had been influenced by teachers, employers, and colleagues and those influences had shaped our interests and our destinies. Kate here talks about the way that perceptions of her specialism were limiting her. Taking a course changed this:

> **Having spent seven years doing research within science, I then became disillusioned with certain aspects of it. However, I found that I had been 'pigeonholed' as a biologist with knowledge of internal aspects of animals, when all my postgraduate and postdoctoral research experience had been with 'whole' animals. Finally, doing part-time science teaching in desperation, I did a 'free' course in women's studies. I was fascinated by the course, not having had much overt contact with this subject before. I was especially fascinated to come across the discourse on women and science (and did particularly well in my assignment in this area). This provided a bridge into research from a feminist and sociological viewpoint.**

Whilst for Kate there were positive outcomes from her experience of learning, we should be careful to remember that as researchers and teachers we carry an ethical responsibility to those with whom we come into contact. As Loraine indicates the knowledge of the effect of others on our own lives and perceptions can only emphasise the two-way nature of this process:

> **A research interview can make you look at 'your life' in a way that is new. I am anxious that an interview (whether it be for research or for a job) may construct a new meaning and I feel a responsibility to do all I can to ensure that the view is positive and that the interview encounter does not leave a person feeling negative or unforgiving about themselves.**

Conclusion

In the process of putting this paper together for a workshop at the conference we found that some of us 'had more experience' at composing a life history with which they were satisfied. We thought this was partly related to age and the amount of life material, as it were, that was available. We also found that we had different levels of ease and different approaches to the construction of our accounts. This is reflected in the varied degrees of subjectivity and range of tones in the personal narrative. How do we understand this variety? In part, we felt, differences might be attributed to what we had learned of how to "do biography": to write or speak personally. Exploration of this theme suggested that we had learned in part through our different academic backgrounds, out of our disciplinary identities.

AUTOMATHSBIOGRAPHIES

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Abstract

Throughout my education and as classroom teacher and teacher educator, I have been fascinated by the feelings evoked by mathematics. Since all primary teachers are responsible for teaching mathematics their experiences as a learner affect their attitudes to, and feelings about teaching mathematics. This paper explores how their experiences were collected using 'automathsbiographies' and the issues they raise for the teaching and learning of mathematics.

What is an automathsbiography?

It is an autobiography of the writers experiences of mathematics, from earliest memories to present day. It includes the writer's experiences as a learner and teacher, and how their experiences of mathematics have influenced their choice of age range(s) taught.

Using automathsbiographies.

The choice of instrument was influenced by Tobias' work with mathematically anxious adults. The automathsbiographies were collected from ITT students plus a number of practicing teachers attending a course. The biographies were anonymous so extracts are used to illustrate particular issues that arose in a number of responses rather than citing specific biographies and writers.

The rationale for collecting prior experiences of mathematics lies in a perception of a marked lack of confidence of many student teachers and teachers studying mathematics education. The majority of primary teachers are female with an 'arts' background and have often had negative experiences as a learner of mathematics. The intention was to explore some of the preconceptions which influence reactions to mathematics whether as a learner or teacher.

The variety of impressions, feelings and ideas about mathematics and mathematics education, are influenced by exposure to cultural influences including parental, family and peer attitudes, media, cultural myths and legends (Tobias 1978). These include gender stereotypes, and beliefs that mathematical ability is innate.

Utilising these perceptions and experiences as part of studying mathematics teaching is to acknowledge their influence on the learner and teacher. There appears to be a strong relationship between the conceptions of mathematics held by a teacher and the teaching and learning styles they use (Thompson, 1984).

All teachers have and use a variety of models, concerns, and priorities when working in the classroom. These relate to school management, social context and personal emotional factors, and other areas of the curriculum. Such general conceptions are likely to take precedence over teaching and learning decisions which are specific to mathematics (Thompson, 1984). This requires the teacher being able to unpack accumulated ideas carefully, not only in the context of strategies and approaches favourable to mathematics, but also in the context of the overall task of teaching in the primary classroom. Past success in mathematics may lead teachers to modelling their ideas about teaching and learning on patterns they have experienced, regardless of their appropriateness to the primary classroom. Past failure may encourage avoidance, minimal contact with mathematics and lead to the transmission of mathematical anxiety to their students (Bulmahn and Young 1982).

Issues from automathsbiographies.

Feelings about mathematics.

Writers showed their anxieties with the use of words such as *'embarrassing'*, *'struggling'*, *'failing'*, *'terrified'*, *'demoralised'*, *'pressured'*, *'frightened'*, and *'out of my depth'*. All the biographies contained some negative aspects:

> I remember feeling very inadequate, as I knew I was on one of the lower tables.

They were generally negative even those who went on to study mathematics at degree level; few were wholly positive:

> I took home extra work because I was successful and enjoyed getting 17 to 20 out of 20. I felt as though I had achieved something.

There were two strands to the positive responses either about success or where mathematics was linked to its' application.

> I always enjoyed maths because it seemed a totally dependable and reliable subject, where you were given a challenge and had the skills to solve it.
>
> Doing statistics at college with psychology brought everything clear again, being able to freely use stats packages and calculators certainly helped.

Particular areas of mathematics.

Bell et al, 1983, points to key areas of mathematics causing difficulty. From the biographies algebra, fractions and mental arithmetic were frequently associated with difficulty.

> My mental arithmetic has always been, still is, atrocious: springing perhaps from extreme anxiety over spot tables, around eight years of age.
>
> I do remember not being able to do fractions!
>
> The trouble started with a school change and the introduction of the dreaded algebra!

There were also more general comments.

> I don't think there was one particular aspect of maths that I found difficult-- I struggled most of the time!

For those studying mathematics at a A level and beyond dislike of areas of mathematics arose, usually associated with failure or lack of understanding.

> Did not understand or enjoy much of mechanics (and failed paper both years). It all seemed irrelevant! (and totally beyond me).

The role of the teacher.

Biographies revealed a high degree of blame attached to teachers, and their role was a main feature of the biographies.

> ...the teacher thought I had cheated by looking up the answers at the back of the book, because my answers were exactly right. Although she didn't accuse me, she called

> everyone up and tore all the answer pages out of the books. I never forgave her for humiliating me like that.

There were some positive responses:

> I can't remember ever thinking that maths was something I couldn't do. I now think that being good at maths influenced the way others perceived me, and therefore how I perceived myself. We had an excellent teacher who seemed to make everything easy.

Personal failure

This has been well-documented by Tobias, 1978; Buxton, 1981, with many people attributing failure with mathematics as a personal failure. Specific instances in the biographies were often masked leading to a more general 'feel' of failure created over time.

> I started to bunk my maths lessons rather than remain with the constantly quickening heartbeat and the sense that I would be found out as a failure... To be honest, maths for me is till a case of ***red alert*** and panic stations.

Although it is not possible to discuss the links between personal failure and gender from the sample, it is worth reflecting that the majority of biographies collected were from female students or teachers.

Gender

The literature on gender and mathematics suggest that any apparent differences which exist between the sexes are not due to ability (Walden and Walkerdine, 1985).

> I enjoyed maths, especially when I got on well in a female teacher's class at O- level. I realised maths was not 'just for boys'.
>
> Due to the fact that I thought at the time that girls don't do maths, it was unusual for a girl to do maths at University, I based my A-level choices on arts and language.
>
> ...both my male teachers had seemed to encourage the boys more than girls. I think my stubborn nature made me want to do well because of their attitude to 'show them' as it were.

One student teacher added reactions from the children in school to her liking of mathematics.

> Children especially the most able felt surprise that I like maths and can do maths. It's because I'm a woman....

The influence of others' attitudes to mathematics on the writers' own attitudes.

For some writers of the biographies the attitudes of parents and society's views in general added to their feelings.

> At home I was always given maths problems, there was a lot of pressure to 'get it right' which made me nervous about the topic. This may be one reason why I have a fear of maths.
>
> My mother is a maths teacher so she would help me with homework. I'm not sure that it was a positive step. I think because I felt that my mum was good at maths so I should be and felt inadequate because I didn't enjoy it.

Choice of teaching group.

Writers were asked to include whether their attitude to mathematics had influenced the choice of age group they teach or were planning to teach. Some had considered their negative attitudes to confidence and ability, either in an attempt to rectify the situation or to reduce the threat to their personal confidence.

> Perhaps my experiences have had an influence on the age group I have decided to teach, because it is important at such an age (3-9) not to make them feel nervous about maths, and try to make maths fun.
>
> I feel more at ease teaching infants in that I don't have to worry they'll shoot up above my level. I find it fun with them, because it's concrete and it helps me relate it more easily. I feel I can sympathize with those who find it a difficult subject to grasp.

Others were quite specific about the aspect of teaching mathematics that concerned them:

> The thing I am worried about is using the right terminology to explain mathematical concepts in such a way children will understand.

Although the students tried to be positive, they often used their poor experiences of mathematics to restrict their choices:

> I want to teach infants partly because of my lack of confidence in maths. I can't escape the idea that it is only for clever people.
>
> I feel relatively confident about having a general standard of maths for coping in the classroom, but I am worried about problem solving type questions. With teaching middle-upper juniors it is likely that the children will understand or solve a maths problem before I do!

Writers who had studied maths as a main subject or as their first degree gave two contrasting views. Those who wanted to help young children enjoy mathematics, and those who wanted to pursue their interest and might switch to teach secondary later.

> I get very wound up when I hear of children who do not enjoy maths, I feel very strongly about this. I want others to enjoy maths as well as understand.
>
> I enjoy maths, and it is because of this experience that I hope to teach maths in secondary school. This was a difficult decision to make, because I realise how important maths is in primary schools, but the style of teaching in primary schools puts me off. Another reason for choosing to teach 'my subject' is that I really enjoy it.

Although most of the examples came from student teachers, confidence in teaching mathematics especially to the older primary pupils remained an issue for some teachers long into their careers, expressed in comments such as: 'I wouldn't dare to attempt maths with older children'. For some teachers interest in mathematics teaching came later as one teacher who specialised in French wrote....

> Interest in maths aroused, a) seeing children 2-13 often struggling and miserable over maths, b) having two children of my own who found/find maths a problem. I am aware now that maths can be fun and haphazard maths teaching leads to despair and panic just as haphazard French teaching can.

Conclusions.

In the process of asking students and teachers to write their automathsbiographies many shared and compared experiences. This enabled them to discuss specific issues from their experiences and to explore the consequences for them in the role of learner and then as teacher. What is interesting is the strength of negative feelings expressed by the writers.

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TO BECOME A RESEARCHER: CAREER PATHS OF TWO SWEDISH GRADUATE STUDENTS

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In this paper I present a part of the project concerning graduate students' (female and male) careers, experiences and cultures at Uppsala University in Sweden. Three departments at Uppsala University have been chosen for an in-depth investigation, as they have an even distribution of gender among active graduate students. The project is carried out by researchers representing the following disciplines Education, Psychology and Linguistics.

I am engaged in the educational part of the study. The questions of concern here are as follows:

- How do the actors become doctoral students?
- What life story do they have?
- What career prospects do they have?

The methodological approach is Life history, i.e. I am interested in various specific biographies of doctoral students of both sexes and their ways to become researchers. In autumn 1992 I made 24 in-depth, unstructured interviews. I am in the process of a deep qualitative analysis. To start with I contrasted students by pair: a female with a male. In this paper I am going to present two actors - Karin and Ulf. They were a couple already before applying for graduate study in the social sciences.

They come from non-academic families, i.e. Karin has a working-class background, and Ulf has a middle class background. Both got a lot of encouragement from their parents. Karin's parents wanted her to get a 'real' profession, i.e. to become a physician. She studied natural sciences at school, and was not interested at all in humanities.

Ulf's parents were humanists and very interested in history. For Ulf it was a very early discovery of history, e.g.he listened to his grandfathers' stories, which made him interested in the subject up to university level.

For Karin it was not so straight forward an engagement and interest. It was her life and work experience, and not a school or family, which made her rethink her plans. When she became 18 years old, she left the school and got married. She worked in the hospital and continued the school to make her marks better. After the graduation she divorced, left her home town and moved to South Sweden to live in a working-collective. This half-year became a turning point in her life.

When she came back she took a course in weaving as she became interested in the folk art. The weaving course included 3 weeks of practice which she decided to make at a museum. There was a lot of textile to work with. For four summers she took a job at the museum. It was through her job in the museum that she came in contact with history and found it relevant. She worked for several years combining it with her studies at the college. In the end she began to study at Uppsala University, looking for a job all the time. So she worked at different museums in different towns. In December 1984 she got a place in graduate studies. Ulf was already there, and they were living together for about half a year.

When Karin looks back to find an explanation as to why there was a dramatic change of her interest in the subject she was not interested in at all at school, she wonders why. She tries hard to find the reason for her interest in ethnology research. Was it only a coincidence or was there a reason? She remembers her visits as a child to her grand parents, where she met the tradition of folk music and textile art.

For Ulf it was more simple. He took undergraduate studies in economic history and the national economy. His exam was in history. Besides his parents were teachers, so it was natural for him to think about his future as a history teacher. To choose economic history had a political connotation for Ulf too. The department had a reputation of being the most Marxist in Sweden.

For Ulf it is important to mention too that the quality of his essay at the end of under-graduate studies gave him a chance to start graduate studies. But he never was forced to choose, the choice was made automatically. "If one got money to do research it was a natural choice".

An important observation can be made here, i.e. how often the actors try TO FIND A REASON for their IMPORTANT DECISIONS in THEIR LIVES. They look for a rational in their life stories, they need to structure it to be able to understand it and to understand themselves.

* * *

At the time I carried out the interviews, Ulf was already completing his Ph.D. He worked at the department with the research project. Karin had a half year to run hoping to be able to finish her dissertation in time.

It could be interesting to look at how they perceive their roles as researchers, and what plans they have to continue in this career. From the very beginning of graduate studies both Ulf and Karin felt like becoming a part of research community. They got their own rooms with equipment in. They were no longer the students, but the research workers coming to work. The climate and the conditions to write own dissertation were very stimulating.

For Ulf to choose a research topic was not a problem. Already at undergraduate level he had a specific interest, so it was a continuation. When Ulf later on applied to graduate studies the same researcher who was his tutor, became his supervisor. Today the former supervisor is a Professor and Ulf proudly says that he can call himself a student to Professor.

Karin had difficulties in accepting her new position. From the very beginning she was concerned that it was not a permanent solution for her to be in graduate studies. Rather she waited to see and was ready to leave as soon as she could find a job at the museum. Karin doubted about her staying at the department and blamed her "family roots" which did not equip her in social "tools" to belong to the university world. She talks about being uncertain of herself in the university environment. Of course, she got support from her family to continue her study, but at the same time she had an uncertainty about being not good enough. She looks for explanations in either her family or just being a female. She said that she had two sides in herself which were standing there: a belief that she was cleaver enough, and the fear of being not able to make it.

Karin recalls that she first discovered her 'double side' at undergraduate level when she worked in a small group consisting only of men. She experienced them as very dominant. No matter how hard she worked and how much she had to say there was no place for her to introduce her own views. Being a researcher meaning there is constant demand for one to be able to argue, to be quick in response, to come up with viewpoints and always have something to say. One has to be seen and heard by others.

For Ulf it was an obvious decision to study history, she said. Already in his childhood he knew he was going to be a researcher. It was a straight forward for him. For her it was different. It only happened by chance - "It is not the easiest place to be in and to become a researcher" she said.

And here is a very interesting rational from Karin: because she made such an effort to adjust she could not understand that her decision was just a coincidence. As it was only a coincidence, why just this particular career? Instead she could have come to a place where it is easier to make a career. Nevertheless, she has a disposition to do research, and she thinks it is fun to do it. So it cannot be a coincidence, but her own decision.

Ulf talks about his relation with a supervisor: "I do not like to have a supervisor if I do not need one". He worked independently and only if he had questions to discuss did he ask for advice. His former supervisor is now a colleague and they work together. For Ulf, to become a researcher was a process of gradually building his own competence and becoming accepted by a community of researchers. From being a young colleague to become one of the 'lads'. He recalls that there were no clear borders between younger and older colleagues, which made the process easier. But he has developed his identity as a researcher now, two years after his dissertation.

In comparison to Karin, Ulf identifies with his career totally. It is important to be sincere, frank to himself in the scientific milieu, and admit to himself his positive and negative sides. After that he has to work with the weaker parts. He knows that he is a good empiricist, he knows how to work in an archive and how to find and interpret data. But to write and read is another problem, so he has to work to improve this. With reading he found a strategy by talking with senior researchers about their reading and how to get information quickly.

* * *

For both Karin and Ulf it is difficult to talk about the future as the picture is not clear and there are so many uncertainties. Karin is not even sure of her future is at the university at all. Karin's dream is to get a job at the museum which includes research. Unfortunately there are no such jobs. To be engaged in research only "is a way of life and work", "you never can stop". But, if her supervisor is lucky enough to find some reserve finance, she might stay and work with a project.

The future for Ulf is not easy to predict, either. After the dissertation., which he completed over six years, he obtained a temporary research position. He applied for a university position, also a temporary one, but he did not get it. The competition is hard. He thinks he will be staying at the department and in the university milieu. One has to have a luck but there is an effort to make as well, to prove that one is competent. He cannot just be good, he must be the best. He needs support from his Professor as well.

* * *

To be a research couple is an interesting matter. Karin talks about flexible time which makes it very easy for them to take care of children, to share their domestic duties, but most of all to understand each other.

For Ulf to be married to a researcher and to work at the same institution has both positive and negative aspects. To take care of children (paid leave during a year) and share domestic duties can negatively a career. It is against other men that he is competing, he said. If he works less, because of home duties, it influences his position, i.e. he cannot achieve better results than others. "It is difficult to combine these two worlds".

This is an interesting example of a woman and a man in a research setting, who are at the beginning of their careers. Is it typical that Karin, as a women, does not have high expectations to stay as a researcher and wants to withdraw? Ulf is aware of the competition he faces and he really fights to get the best both by "using" his luck and contacts with his Professor, and by working hard. But, as he says, he competes with men only. These two pictures are not necessarily true for all female and male graduate students. But they exist in reality in this case, and may be typical for many male and female young researchers.

LIFE HISTORY AND PERSONAL VALUES IN THE SELECTION AND TRAINING OF PROFESSIONALS

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Introduction

Students admitted to professional training courses in social services are required to demonstrate their ability to apply academic knowledge to practical situations, drawing on the relevant social sciences. However, they are also expected to have certain values in order to meet minimum professional ethical standards. This paper examines the controversial area of the values of social workers, and the place that personal values have in their selection and education, in relation to life history methodologies.

In the 1990's social workers were subjected to criticism for attempting to realise values set out by the national training body, (CCETSW, Paper 30, 1989). John Major has deplored social workers' use of *trendy social theories*, (Major, J. Guardian, July 14th, 1993). The Social Worker's Training Body has itself been criticised for having *taken equal opportunities too far*, (Bottomley, V. Independent, Dec 13th 1992), and is currently being forced to review its role. How are people to be recruited and trained, in relation to "required" values?

Firstly, there is the issue of the ethics and politics of the chosen values. Why these values? The tradition of many of the human service professions - strongly supported by academia - has been to adhere to a liberal concept of respect for persons. Recent social work debates (Webb, 1991a, 1991b, Dominelli, 1991), are about an anti-oppressive approach to practice which goes beyond both liberal individualism and "common sense". I take it that whatever else a value position involves, it involves a degree of choice that needs to be justified.

I support a concept of anti-oppressive values that draws on the experiences of members of dominated social groups, and connects with life history methodologies. A good ethical reason for this choice is that the traditional concept of respect for persons is empty without contextualising it within real social situations. Respect for an abstract concept - the individual - needs to be operationalised into respect for real people who are different from yourself. It is critical whether the socially dominant can respect individuals who belong to the corresponding dominated group: for instance, do the straight respect the gay and lesbian? **Anti-oppressive** values conceive the major social divisions (usually defined so as to include disability, sexual orientation and age as well as race, class, and gender), as the key factors in practice and research, requiring '*...a fundamental rethinking of values, institutions and relationships*, rather than an **anti-discriminatory** practice that *..will work to a model of challenging unfairness*', (Phillipson 1992).

The epistemological reasons, intersecting with the ethics, are firstly that those who have personal experience of a particular oppression have a perspective which gives them a counter-hegemonic, (therefore, potentially greater) understanding of it, (Personal Narratives Group 1989). Secondly, it is essential that understanding of the interconnections of social divisions are accessed from a perspective capable of doing justice to both their uniqueness **and** their structuring. A number of women - black, disabled, working class and lesbian -

(thus with multiple experiences of oppression), have in recent years been writing about the kind of methods and perspectives needed, and I have drawn on their work, (amongst others: Bhavnani 1990; 1993; Brodski and Schenk 1988; Collins 1990; Gluck and Patai 1991; Lorde 1984; Morris 1992 and 1993; Hooks 1982, 1984 and 1989; Personal Narratives Group 1989; Stanley 1990 and 1992).

An anti-oppressive ethic/methodology involves taking full account of: 1. Social difference, the major social divisions, and their internal categories, (eg different disabilities, ethnicities), and interconnections. 2. Power issues: political, social and economic power of dominant groups; physical and material resources of individuals, and organisations, and their cultural and psychological strengths and weaknesses. 3. Personal and political systems: the political aspects of intimate personal relationships and the interconnections of different *levels* of social life, and the interaction, change, conflict and breakdown of systems. 4. Location in time and place: placing people and events in specific historical time and place; placing psychological considerations in a concrete social and historical context. 5. Reflexivity: auto/biographical awareness of self and other: personal history, institutional position and possibilities of dialogue. An anti-oppressive ethic/methodology thus demands that an understanding of personal values is central, and needs to be contextualised within a critical social life history framework, (Clifford, 1994). The contention that values emanating from life experience lie at the heart of the validation process (Collins 1990) implies that it is on this foundation that the selection and training of professionals should be approached.

The assessment of personal values either at the admissions stage or later is necessary and dependent on an appreciation of the life history of the person being assessed, and the person doing the assessing. For instance, the use of application forms, portfolios and C.V's can be investigated from a life history or auto/biographical perspective, (cf Miller, N. and Morgan, D. 1993), where the exercise of power by the reader, and presentational skills by the writer is an interplay that raises numerous anti-oppressive issues. Whose life is being assessed? Is it being presented and interpreted in the context of the social and historical principles stated here? Who is doing the assessing, and are they using a self-critical and auto/biographical approach to their socially and historically located task? This raises issues about not only the individual's awareness of their own personal history and characteristics, but also of the institutional and political framework, and the peer group structure, within which they are working. Is there agreement about the appropriate values? Is it expressed in any policy statement?

The essential point is that people's values are revealed in the life history and stories they tell about their lives. It is important to design assessment tools that will enable people to reveal aspects of their lives that bear upon key personal values - not to restrict the way they seek to define themselves by inappropriate insistence upon male concepts of linearity for example, (Human, M, 1987). It is also essential that assessors are trained to recognise their own values and position, and are able to apply anti-oppressive principles to the interpretation of the life history they assess. The assessment of prior learning is related to the assessment of personal values. It is also an example of how assessing life histories can be used constructively or negatively, for '*...institutions whose power structures depend on maintaining the status quo*' (see Humphries, B. 1990) will tend to value only the prior learning that meets their given academic standards - and will not seek to assess the values that are essential to a profession.

In interviews or extended portfolios, what is required is the opportunity for people to tell parts of their life story: in this way their real values, rather than their linguistic skills are tested, and the strengths of dominated groups emerge, (cf Etter-Lewis, 1991), as well as the weaknesses and inexperience of dominating groups. This can conveniently be done by asking interviewees to expand on points in the application form, or they can be invited to talk about incidents from their previous careers that have been relevant to the profession for which they wish to train. A key indicator is the ability to recount a **personal** example of oppression from their life and/or work experience, where they have been oppressed, or where they recognise their oppression of others.

On the Recruitment and Selection Panel which I chair, it has been policy to train interviewers; to make clear policy statements about values to all applicants; to prepare proformas and interview questions to try to achieve the desired anti-oppressive aim, and to ensure that our interview panels (of two) contain at least one black, or disabled, or woman interviewer, as appropriate. This recognises that the interaction is a process which is most likely to be effective if there are people on the staff side of the panel who can relate to key life experiences of the applicant.

There remain many problems which we are continually debating, but our broad aim has been to attempt to identify minimum negative values in relation to all oppressed groups, so that people are not allowed on the course who are not able to meet these standards, (and to positively assess those who can). Our advice to short-listers and interviewers has been that both unacceptable values and the potential for development can best be assessed in the light of personal narratives that interviewees tell about their own lives. The social and historical context of their life courses provide the best available evidence that their claims about their values are rooted in socialising experiences that have affected their lives, and not on brief acquaintance with correct language.

In addition to using life history in the assessment of personal values on admission, we also use it as an essential part of training and assessment on the course itself. One example is the session on **reflexivity** which forms a central component of our anti-oppressive practice teaching. One half of the equation in is always the person of the professional: who is s/he? What personal, institutional and structural power/powerlessness underlies the actions of the person who intervenes on behalf of an agency in the lives of others?

This issue has traditionally been seen in terms of a psychodynamic understanding of the self, (cf Ferard, M.L. and Hunnybun, N.K. 1962), using concepts such as transference and counter transference. The related concept of identity has also traditionally been see in psychological terms, (Erikson, 1950), whereby a person's identity continues to develop throughout life, depending on how they resolve the various developmental stages. These psychological concepts need to be socially contextualised, (Squires, 1989) within the structure of the social divisions, and cannot take precedence over a sociological understanding of the history of the self.

The position of the individual professional within the social divisions viz a viz others gives them a position of relative power/powerlessness, (Bhavnani, 1990) and this can only be fully grasped in terms of a specific personal and family social history - which the worker has him/her self examined. In addition the position of the worker within a particular social setting, agency or institution also gives them a relative position of power and powerlessness which overlaps and interacts with the personal and structural power that the social divisions confer. All professional workers therefore need to assess themselves in practical situations in relation to a particular other. They need to consider their own life history, whilst being aware of the inevitability of their use of mythical, social and time-situated concepts in the interpretation of lives, (Lorde, 1984; Stanley, 1992).

Part of the effort to understand the way our lives have been structured is to name, to recognise, the complex oppressions that have affected us, and to accept and realise the oppressions in which we have been involved. But there is an element of creating a story/narrative and thus choosing an identity. In a sense, because the truth is hard or impossible to achieve we are necessarily creating a myth about ourselves rather than simply uncovering/recognising the realities. These are not necessarily to be seen as mutually exclusive. Audre Lorde (1984) uses the concept of *biomythography*, where the self becomes a constructed balance between the different parts of oneself, NOT as a form of unique individualism but rather as: *a mosaic of other selves welded into a powerful whole* (Raynaud, C. p.241).

It is thus part of the training that professionals and admissions interviewers need to receive that they recognise the centrality of personal values, and the connection of those values to the life histories of the persons involved. The anti-oppressive values that emphasise the material impact of social divisions on this relationship, and these histories, also include, an awareness of the creative interpretations from both sides. To ignore these considerations is to accept whatever commonsense values happen to predominate in the particular context. Given the shaping of discourse by the powerful, that must tend to the detriment of the powerless. Given the institutional and social structures which constrain professionals, the significance of their understanding and commitment to personal values is therefore not minor, but fundamental to the project of human social services for a human society. It thus applies in principle, with appropriate modifications, to other social services.

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MATHS LIFE HISTORIES: GUILTY SECRETS AND UNTOLD JOYS

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Many people have strong feelings about the maths in their lives: to many it is a threatening subject giving rise to feeling of guilt and inadequacy; to others it the source of untold joys. Either way, maths life history research engages with important ethical and practical issues which are common to other areas of life history research and practice and does so in relation to an aspect of life (mathematics) which has largely been ignored by life history researchers.

The paper will outline our research into maths life histories in which we are attempting to elicit the past mathematical experiences of adults from a variety of backgrounds, including those who do not perceive themselves as involved in any mathematical activity. Our methodology takes the form of qualitative non-observational research (McKernan 1991) involving semi-structured interviews and narrative accounts (Spradley 1979, Denzin 1978, Schatzman and Strauss 1973). We chose this because it enables us to maintain points of comparison between subjects while engaging in open-ended, in-depth conversations.
The project has been designed in conjunction with the Careers Service and we are focusing on mature students studying subjects which are not necessarily mathematics related. The evidence gathered in the form of interview transcripts and research subjects' narratives will be analysed to produce data which will be used to evaluate the research methodology and to prove or disprove the hypotheses. We shall seek to identify common themes (both within individuals' life histories and between subjects). Furthermore we shall investigate the significance of single events and possible relationships between events which may appear unconnected either to each other or to the mathematics learning and performance of the individual. We anticipate that this will lead to the construction of original interpretative frameworks which will be of value in further developing this field of educational research.

Our hypotheses are:
-Adults' past experiences of mathematics have a significant impact on their life chances.
-Adults' experiences of mathematics are affected by gender, class and cultural background.
-Various incidents, including those which may be perceived to have no mathematical significance, affect adults' mathematical competence and confidence, and may have implications for their career choice and involvement in social movements.

We are at the pilot stage of this research and have conducted interviews with approximately 20 volunteers from a wide variety of educational backgrounds in order to refine our research methodology. In this paper we discuss some of the ethical and practical issues which have emerged to date in the hope that some of them may resonate with other areas of life history research.

Maths Life History Research: Ethics and Practicalities

There is a small but important literature on maths anxiety and 'mathephobia' (Buxton 1981; Maxwell 1989) which bears out our own experience of working with mathematics learners of all ages. We therefore anticipated that asking people about their maths life histories might be painful, not only for the research subjects but also for the researcher. There is also the danger of accidentally triggering some catastrophic memory unconnected with maths. We were acutely aware that research subjects could be disclosing emotionally-charged experiences - there was a danger that we were biting off more than we could chew. We felt uneasy about and people placing themselves in potentially vulnerable positions and the extent of our obligation - and capacity - to help them to deal with any resulting pain. At the pilot stage, some of our volunteers were colleagues and in the current political climate there is a very real danger that disclosures of mathematical - or any other - inadequacy could undermine one's professional standing. We are especially grateful to those colleagues and friends who threw caution to the wind and trusted us sufficiently to take that risk. This issue will remain in a different form for the mature students who will be our research subjects in the next phase of the project, with regard to their standing on their courses.

Given the sensitivities surrounding mathematics, we have been surprised and impressed by the enthusiasm with which people have volunteered - we have been overwhelmed by the numbers of people wanting to become involved. Many have expressed relief at the opportunity - often their first - to explore their experiences of mathematics. Some subjects have remarked on the therapeutic value of the interview and we have found that most interviewees want to talk for longer than the hour that we - and they - have allowed. One strategy we use is to use a tape that clicks off after one hour, but some research subjects still do not want to stop! We have also been encouraged by the interest shown by colleagues near and far.

There has seemed to be little embarrassment for people in admitting that they found maths difficult: not being able to do maths does seem to be more socially acceptable than admitting an inability to read. However, we are faced with the paradox that almost all our subjects - including those who are clearly competent and confident mathematically - responded to the interview questions in ways which suggested we had triggered some deep emotional responses, both positive and negative. We are not just finding evidence of stress in people who are clearly maths-phobic, neither are we finding only negative feelings - several people have spoken of their pleasure and excitement in aspects of maths. Accordingly, our focus has shifted away from maths anxiety per se and towards wider issues of emotional responses to maths and perceptions of maths, and it is these areas, and the ethical and practical issues raised by our research, that we want to discuss here.

Maths has an image problem: it is seen as hierarchical, male, impenetrable, objective and value-neutral (Ernest 1989). Furthermore, not being able to do maths is often equated with being stupid and is consequently shaming. There is a further twist demonstrated in many of our interviews where people expressed the view that "if I can do it, it can't be maths". We have found many examples of this, which we have termed the 'invisible maths factor', in other words, for many people, maths is what you can't do, never what you can do. It seems to us that this perception of mathematics must inhibit the ability to transfer skills because if people do not recognise their skills, knowledge and understanding as mathematical, they cannot transfer these to different contexts. We intend to pursue this in further research.

A related issue to emerge is that people do not appear to recognise the maths they can do as mathematics unless it is in the form of standard algorithms or formulae. 'Proper maths', for most of our subjects so far, seems to consist mainly of arithmetic - indeed, not only arithmetic, but standard algorithms in arithmetic. This is compounded by the widely-held view amongst our subjects that there is only one standard algorithm for each operation - usually the way they were told to do it in school. For example, one subject, a young man, insisted that a piece of mathematics was not mathematics unless he had 'the formula' even though he could do the operation using his own method. Such narrow and morally-loaded conceptions of maths are intriguing and would appear to have implications for maths educators.

Our research so far has confirmed our impression that adults' knowledge of maths is often fragmented. It is rather like the knowledge of London acquired by people who travel mostly by underground and do not necessarily know how the stations relate to each other on the surface (an image which raises interesting questions about which is more 'real', the surface or the underground?). Our research indicates that experiences of being taught maths can compound the problem of fragmentation and highlights the issue of whether maths is what you have been taught or what you have learned. Is it constructed by the learner, as constructivists following Lakatos (1976) claim, or is it delivered by the teacher? Is mathematics practising what is already known or constructing techniques to solve new problems?

Mathematics has a formal code of its own which is inaccessible to many people, including many of our research subjects. No-one 'speaks maths as a first language' - you have to be taught it. Mathematics is therefore peculiarly vulnerable to bad teaching, indeed we wonder how much maths is actually taught, rather than merely told. Our evidence indicates that some of our subjects may have experienced more telling than teaching.

Certainly the importance of 'significant others' has been borne out in our research. These may be teachers, parents or friends who may help or hinder, but whose influence persists sometimes for many years after the event. One woman described her memories of being taught by a nun (nicknamed 'the bulldog') at her convent school who would 'explain' a piece of mathematics to the class and then ask someone to repeat her explanation to the class. Our subject vividly described her shame and humiliation at not being able to do so.

Guilt and shame are compounded because maths is seen as such an important subject, a point remarked on by almost all of our subjects. Many expressed regret at either not being able to continue their mathematics education, or at not doing as well as they wished because of the effect this has had on their life chances. Even where there was no apparent regret, either because inadequacies in the subject's maths education had been overcome, or because he or she had chosen a path that avoided maths as far as possible (although we felt that these subjects were doing far more maths than they gave themselves credit for), there was recognition that success in maths held the key to skilled work and the opportunities and challenges in life that went with it. Mathematics educators clearly bear a heavy responsibility.

Despite the prevalence of regret and other negative responses to aspects of their experiences of maths, all our subjects spoke of their pleasure in tackling some aspects of maths, for example that involved in making something, or in working out a tricky problem. Several people described sophisticated mathematical operations which they performed with evident enjoyment. It was when we asked people about their practice of maths rather than their experiences as learners of maths that we found most positive responses. But these were not easy to find: while people readily talked about their experiences of learning maths as children, it was initially very difficult to get them to identify and talk about their mathematical experiences as adults. We have found we can overcome this by asking about work and other adult experiences and probing for mathematical aspects in these contexts. However, this raises a further ethical issue involving the problematic nature of the boundary separating maths from non-maths. Our subjects had volunteered to talk to us about their maths life histories - to what extent is it valid to ask them about aspects of their lives which they may perceive as having nothing to do with maths?

We are currently reconsidering the amount of time we had allowed for tape transcription, as we recognise that body language and gesture are as important as the words to the narrative; we are still exploring ways of recording these so as to ensure reasonable comparability of our interview transcriptions. This raises further questions common to all life history researchers. How much should we leave out? How should we select what is important and make our selection criteria explicit? In such a new and uncharted area, how do we classify and draw out significant issues and experiences and present them in a coherent way? How, also, do we avoid patronising our subjects - for example, issues of class, gender, ethnicity and culture all emerged in our pilot interviews but not all interviewees considered them significant; to what extent is it legitimate to impose our own understandings on other people's lives? Furthermore, how do we ensure the accessibility of our research findings to all those involved in the research? Who 'owns' the research, and what is the relationship between the process and the product? Most importantly, how do we keep faith with our research subjects while making a useful contribution to knowledge in this under-researched area?

In revealing more about adults' mathematical experiences throughout their lives, maths life history research may indicate ways of altering perceptions of mathematics teaching and learning so that learners of all ages do not have the negative experiences reported by all our subjects. Our research so far has indicated that there is much more work to be done concerning the practice of mathematics as well as the learning of maths in different contexts at all ages. We need to understand much more about adults' informal, experiential, enjoyable and often highly effective methods of doing mathematics and we need to make and strengthen links between these and formal mathematics teaching and learning to ensure greater transferability of skills so that future generations of maths life history researchers may come across more 'untold joys' than 'guilty secrets'.

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USING LIFE HISTORIES
ON A 'WAYS INTO WORK' COURSE

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Introduction

This paper discusses the way the writing of life histories contributes to learning on a Return to Learning programme at an adult education centre in Inner London. The discussion focuses in particular on one course, Ways into Work, which targets unemployed adults, often with little experience of formal education, who want to improve their general level of education or build up confidence, in order to get back to work. It also draws on the experiences of students and tutors on other courses within the programme.

It is not unusual for adult education to promote the writing of life histories through oral history and reminiscence projects. Webster (1992) cites Dolly Davey's 'A Sense of Adventure' as an example of an autobiography produced through discussion at meetings of the SE1 Social History Project. She comments that autobiography by working class men and women tends to be read as social history rather than literature, affirming the value of working class community and culture, rather than describing or explaining individual experience.

The Ways into Work course, however, is not a project of this kind. It does not aim to produce autobiography, either as social history or literature. It is goal oriented and success is measured in terms of students going on to work or further training. Indeed, funding is contingent upon such outcomes and a substantial element of the syllabus consists of activities such as job search, writing CVs, completing applications and practising interview techniques. Work experience is arranged whenever possible and those students who need to, attend writing skills, maths and IT courses.

Thus the course can be seen to fit into two regulatory frameworks; on the one hand an employment training framework where adults who could be said to be part of an emerging pool of temporary and lower skilled part time staff and who will not enjoy the benefits of job security, good wages, training and development provided by an employer (CENTEC 1992/3). They have to demonstrate that they are 'actively seeking work' or lose entitlement to benefit. On the other hand, one wherein literacy is seen in terms of the tasks that must be performed to function effectively in everyday life (Rockhill 1988).

Rockhill in discussing how literacy has been constructed through processes of state formation and industrialisation in the 19th century and the move towards mass schooling, shows how this led inevitably to asymmetrical power relations (on the premise of personal responsibility and the inequalities that are a feature of modern society). She quotes (Cook-Gumperz 1986):

> '..... literacy, schooling, education and intelligence became inextricably linked to a morality of individual responsibilities for economic well being' and goes on to say 'literacy as ideology is integral to its use as a means of governance'.

Thus the very means by which students see themselves improving their life chances and gaining control over their lives are also the means through which their participation in the labour market is mediated and regulated.

How We Work

Using concepts of location, positionality and agency (Open University 1992) students are able to reflect on their experiences by acknowledging that our lives - all lives - are shaped by the epistemologies and the relationships of production of a particular time and place, already determined patterns of social and cultural relationships which make profound impression on individual lives and our unique individualism which construes our circumstances in a variety of ways and can challenge, change, react, respond accordingly.

Students are then able to reconstruct their histories by challenging any parts which they feel mislead or subvert them. Through writing they become cognisant of the differences and connections between the public and private self. They explore some of the important interconnections between themselves and others by engaging in a group dynamic. By these means students are stimulated to articulate their personal philosophy or aspirations, to acknowledge their particular skills and undertake forward planning.

As students begin the process they unlock experience which now counts as important, valid knowledge. Challenge and change are accepted as being difficult and painful processes and these are recognised by the tutor and articulated so that everyone on the course understands that they are important parts of learning.

The Student Group

There have been eighteen students in the group, twelve women and six men. They range in age from twenty five to fifty five and vary in background with two having had higher education, one having significant symptoms of dyslexia, eight who have English as their second language, one who went to a school for delicate children and two who are refugees. We have selected two case studies for consideration.

Sarah is forty eight and a refugee from Uganda. She has experienced the pain of seeing her community torn apart and her brother killed. She has ten children and escaped with them to England three years ago. Although well educated and trained as a housekeeper, she has not found work since she came here. She feels isolated and has no support networks which were very strong in Uganda. Her main concern is for her children.

Tom is aged fifty five, Irish and the fifth child of a family of eight. He came from a poor family, left school at fourteen and when his father died he came to join his brothers in England to live and work making frequent trips home whenever possible. He went to evening classes to study English Literature and Philosophy. He also studied electrical installation for three years and worked in several different industries. He lives alone since his brothers have married and was made redundant in 1991. He enjoys his garden.

Like other women on the course, as the principal wage earner in her household, Sarah has a degree of commitment to the labour market. She is not used to being poor because she has always either been employed or shared domestic work with others in her family or community.

Slumped in the chair berating himself, Tom became alive when talking about getting a job. Unemployment is more likely to hit the ego of men, who have been defined all their lives as wage earners. Depressed, he has no social role, and experiences social isolation outside the workplace but has close family ties.

In the UK the flexible labour market which needs a core of professionals under pressure and a pool of insecure labour, means that many women suffer from a policy of devaluation in the low paid, unemployed or part time workforce (Deem 1984, Low Pay Unit Report 1993). Part time tutors are also in this insecure job market. Experience of a situation can potentially induce sympathy for others in the same situation, an alertness to problems they may face and the kind of support and guidance they may need, but it can also be a blind to the significance of that role for others, how they might experience it differently. Tutors ask themselves how they can empower people and whilst their political self says 'What's the use?' we have to be mindful to be open about the difficulties of realities of the job market. Our role is to help them become informed and aware.

The Group Dynamic -
Of great importance was a caring group dynamic where people felt safe to share their uncertainties and yet comfortable to get into dispute with others.

> 'Conflict is one of the stages of development, as each individual struggles for identity and acceptance within the group... This stage is a great leveller and invariably painful, but is necessary to work through it for individual and group development' (Mayhew 1993).

The diversity of the group along with its caring function drew out differences of opinion, individuals speaking from self knowledge, strengths and weaknesses, as demonstrated in the following examples.

1. One day Sarah appeared very quiet and withdrawn, resisted any attempts from others to share whatever was worrying her. I told them to work in twos and Tom immediately said in his broad Irish accent 'I'll work with Sarah'. She beamed silently.

2. In a discussion about the nature/nurture debate, two students from developing countries felt that those from the industrialised north, 'had it on a plate' and there were no excuses for underachievement but laziness. The rather sudden outburst was debated intelligently because as Mayhew et al point out 'Avoidance of conflict results in not bothering to find out why someone says, does or thinks something which in turn results in an entrenchment of positions' (Mayhew 1993).

3. One student 'came out' as the child of an incestuous relationship between his mother and grandfather (father). This was difficult for him but was received with sensitivity by the group and enabled him to talk about his past without having to avoid the issue and negate a part of himself.

The group became aware of each other's outlook on life and the reasons behind it which accounted for actions and viewpoints we might at first, have found difficult to reconcile and we subsequently took these into account and made allowances for them. Through a group awareness, students are also able to challenge our assertion that the normativeness of social organisation is functional for most people.

Change
Some students are sceptical about the value of writing life history. One student who spoke English as another language, on a parallel course declared that 'this was the wrong course for me -

- I need to improve my English - still I have got a lot out of it, it's been good.' She echoed the doubts and ambivalence of others on the course. Nevertheless this woman had continued to attend, she had produced a portfolio of writing of several kinds, including autobiography, and could demonstrate her competence in several fields. She had grown in confidence throughout the course and was enjoying the opportunity to voice her feelings about herself and her circumstances. She had begun to articulate her own sense of worth and was fired with determination.

- What students often do not recognise is that education is invariably an experience of transition. Students manage the stages of transition with all the uncertainties and self doubt - often expressed as self criticism, criticisms of the course and/or the tutor - which the process raises, and which have to be worked through. (Hopson 1988). Writing life history offers students opportunities for forging new aspects of their identity. Jouve (1993) comments that, '..... through writing the self is invented, constructed, projected. Or remains poised on the threshold.'

Writing the CV

Life histories are transformed into a set of saleable assets in which students' lives are detailed in a list of attributes with which they can market themselves.

The process brought about differing responses from students who realised that they had skills and knowledge which they had not previously articulated as being of value whilst there was also a certain amount of resentment at having to present only certain aspects of their lives and to present these parts as a commodity.

It is the tutor who has the power to understand, recognise and examine the students' past to help them produce the most relevant and appropriate 'truths' about their lives which will 'fit' them into the labour market. The tutor has to exercise discretion in manipulating people's lives for this purpose and realise the power dynamic that is involved. Within the regulatory frameworks in which we work, students are invited to become competent in self analysis and take responsibility for the 'truths' about themselves.

Equality Issues

Issues around gender, race and class arose when students' work and life did not fit the white, middle class, male model. For instance, some women had experienced oppression at work and some (like Sarah) had worked in developing countries where their role did not 'match' any notion of what work is in this country, whilst others who had been housewives tried to manage their lives into a set of skills which would suit employers. There is an 'awareness of being different', pain arising from that sense of being somehow incomplete, unable to add up, to see your existence as related to, let alone symbolic of, the world at large (Jouve 1992).

Conclusion

Why use autobiography on a course with such clearly instrumental aims? The answer lies in our attempts to reconcile the contradictions which arise because discourses in education have become a site of struggle where the need for the labour market to constrain and control the flow and ebb of labour conflicts with students' desire for personal development and transformation. The regulatory functions imposed by notions of training mediate and re-shape the more holistic approaches of educationalists.

The teaching and learning context is about relationships, feelings and the deeper aspects of experience not just about language, literacy and minimal skills for the workplace. Therefore as Lubelska (1991) says '.... how we teach is as important, if not more important than what we teach'.

The use of autobiography as methodology on the programme arose in the first place out of the necessary use of the process of assessment and accreditation of prior learning and experience (APEL) which leads to 'action planning'.

This activity requires reflection and reflection inevitably leads us into a deeper examination of the self, revealing the connections between the private and public self. Foucault (1988) believes that the knowledge one gains from the self is primarily practical rather than theoretical knowledge. He defines practices of the self as a set of socially defined techniques which when selected by the individual provide a set of meanings or 'truths' with which the individual can interpret and understand his/her behaviour.

Another theoretical source for the methodological use of autobiography comes from a perspective of literacy work as social practice (rather than the mere development of skills) where students develop a critical understanding of their relations with the world and of their material circumstances and begin to engage critically to transform them (Freire 1972).

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FROM CHAMBERMAIDS TO GRADUATES: MAKING SENSE OF OURSELVES.

by Eileen Fitzgerald Daggett

> 'Perhaps two kinds of discourse on the Holocaust are needed: scrupulously objective investigation... and a literature which will enable us to commemorate the efforts of the victims to survive... This, contrary to Adorno's dictum, is more likely to be provided by literature, by creative imagination than by history.'
>
> Antony Polonsky - *TLS* 6/5/94, page 12, last paragraph.

It is perhaps strange to begin an account of educational life histories with a mention of the Holocaust. However, for those of us born into post-war England and now working in the Universities, it is the intensity of the testimony of Holocaust survivors which has recently given academic legitimacy to other kinds of personal testimony in many fields: oral history, women's autobiographies and slave narratives to name just three. This acceptance of the personal into the academic field has proved to be a fruitful line of approach in feminist studies generally, it has also made researchers more self-aware. The personal testimony of previously silenced voices has led to the foundation of a new authority base; that of Personal Criticism.

In the unsteady post-modern, post-structuralist world of the fragmented nineteen-nineties, the individual voice has come into its own once more and, if sufficiently self-aware, has been granted a new respectability. After killing the author and dismantling the idea of authorised text, influential French critics of the nineteen-sixties and seventies cleared a channel through old, conservative approaches. Into this channel have flowed the differently orientated readings which replenished mainstream academic criticism and theory. Although it was certainly not the main intention of Foucault or Barthes to enable the voices of their chambermaids to enter the Academy, this, in actual fact, has been one result of their critical work, as this paper demonstrates.

These critical movements have legitimised a highly subjective investigation such as the one I have carried out for this paper. Reservations surrounding this kind of work rush in upon me as I try to sift through recordings and memories in an constructive way. I am aware of the boundless capacity which each of us possesses for self-delusion - we cannot lie consciously to ourselves, but internal censors, both conscious and unconscious are constantly at their work, blocking and changing insights, as is also this current version of Me, as I sit at the word-processor, passing judgement upon a former Self with whom I now have very little in common. I do believe, however, that a core set of responses still vibrates within me, reacting differently to re-encountered stimuli and yet at the same time still able to feel the reverberations which that earlier Self experienced.

This paper is written around the educational life histories of myself and a close friend whom I met in 1968 when she was 19 and I was 20. We joined the Civil Service on the same day, as clerical assistants. Our mature Selves now realise that this return to the fold of 'respectable clerical work' was an attempt to find safety, succour and parental approval. We had both been buffeted by sundry storms after leaving our homes in the North of England at the age of 18, as we searched for independence and autonomy in the less restricted, differently ordered society of the South.

Twenty-five years later, in 1993, my friend Brenda graduated in Psychology - she was awarded first class honours. That same year I completed my first year as a Phd student, having spent the previous four years in full-time Higher Education gaining a BA and an MA in English Literature. As research for this paper we spent a total of three days together in early June this year, unearthing the long-buried motivations, expectations and perceptions which have driven our educational lives.

What emerged from these intensive interviews was that for both of us, in differing ways, social and family influences were of paramount importance when making choices in both compulsory and post-compulsory education. Academic and career considerations were unknown to us - initially we were expected to marry, later such considerations appeared to be ridiculously presumptuous. Social position, gender driven constraints and role-models (or rather the lack of them), all exerted pressure when life-decisions had to be made, 'We'd got this little, limited sphere we operated in' Brenda said of our twenty-year-old Selves during one of our interviews.

The forces pressing down to enclose us in that bell-jar were a cocktail of the usual power-generated constraints: class, gender, religion, and in my case, race, since my mother's family were immigrant Irish. The results of these, now denuded of much of their ideological camouflage under the gaze of their one-time victims, were served up to us in various guises which included narrow parental expectations, class based restrictions, limited educational options, gender determined influences and responses, the culture of the sixties, absence of role-models and gruesome choices which were no choices at all - ('You can't have this and you don't want that' - this is something we both say together on tape at one point.)

These oppressive, shaping forces do not operate as separate entities, they are at their most efficient when blended, in varying quantities, together. An example of such a blend occurred, for instance, when the time came for us to decide whether to stay on at school beyond sixteen. The debilitating effect of the limited choices of, at best teacher training college, at worst clerical work, (anything lower would have been unacceptable to our ambitious parents) provides an example of the basic power forces which worked on us through the agency of the whole culture in which we were immersed. We both eventually opted for clerical work, teachers being for us 'the lowest life form imaginable at the time' - another quote from Brenda.

The primary aim of these forces was coercion. Lower class girl-children must be controlled and managed. Everyone around us had differently motivated investments in the conformity of the girl-children to the status quo. We sensed this and reacted to it negatively by withdrawal and refusal, the only weapons available to us. We were ardent in our rejection of what was offered to us and yet, not surprisingly, were incapable of drawing up an alternative life-plan. We knew only what we did not want: we did not want to become our mothers. Our mature Selves have uncovered what was then a subconscious drive behind everything we did. Our mature Selves were also horrified to discover, towards the end of our three days together that we have, in fact, in many ways actually become our mothers after all. We buckled somewhere around 1975 and completely gave in four years later, on becoming mothers ourselves.

Writing in 1928 for a paper on 'Women and Fiction' which was later published under the title of *A Room of One's Own*, Virginia Woolf tells of the importance of the maternal line for young women writers. The maternal line is important for young female readers too. 'My dad used to read philosophy... he did occasionally discuss it with me, but it needed to be my mum and she read Woman's Realm.' quote from Brenda. My own mother, as far as I can remember, read the local evening newspaper. Woolf's uncovering of this vital need, and the equal importance of independent means by which to support intellectual effort, forms the basis of her eloquent account of the pressures encountered by intelligent women down the centuries, 'Making a fortune and bearing thirteen children - no human being could stand it' (Woolf 1929:27) '... is the char-woman who has brought up eight children of less value to the world than the barrister who has made a hundred thousand pounds? It is useless to ask such questions; for nobody can answer them' (Woolf 1929:45).

I would take issue with this last question, which only a middle-class person could ask. 'Value', up there in the middle classes has an entirely more esoteric quality to its meaning than it carries for those of us lower down the social scale. In 1968, Brenda and I knew the answer to Virginia's question: it was 'Yes'. The char-woman, or rather any kind of mother, is of far less value to the world than the barrister. This is still the case today where the media constantly refers to 'working mothers' and 'mothers who do not work', as if the time and energy spent in bringing up children were of no real social or economic value whatsoever.

And so Brenda and I lived in the here and now of the sixties. We fought for independence and formulated happiness as the object of desire. Denied congenial means of working to maintain ourselves and build careers, we decided that what we wanted was to be 'wild and free'. To achieve this aim, strange as it all seems now, we left the Civil Service one year after we had joined it and became chambermaids!

The logic of this step is quiet coherent when viewed from the perspective of our 'little limited sphere'. We felt freed from the threat of becoming our mothers by being paid to do work which our mothers did for nothing. We would finish cleaning rooms at one o'clock, and could then be wild if we chose to. We could go drinking in the pub at lunchtime, or sleep on the beach all afternoon or perhaps ride around in salesmen's cars, things our mothers would *never* do. We had broken out. We felt superior to the guests whose rooms we cleaned in the five star hotel, for all around us they were in chains, trapped in the respectable world, and we were free!

During this period, they were at the barricades in Paris, they were demonstrating in Washington and the grammar school boys were entering British academia. We, their working class sisters, were also interested, in spite of our wildness and freedom, in trying to get some hold on the world we had inherited. We separately began our own programmes of reading. I worked my way through history from the stone-age up to the Stuarts, (something I had completely forgotten about until Brenda reminded me of it last week) and I devoured Victorian novels. Brenda studied the Greeks and Romans, she read Freud - 'we kept a sort of thread, carried a thread, however tenuous' as Brenda put it. We should, of course, have been at University but in the late sixties there was no way for young women without 'A' levels to get there, and anyhow the system had convinced us that we did not want it and that it was not for us anyhow. We both (separately, some years later) applied to the newly founded Open University, and we both recall that it was the cost of the courses which prevented us from going any further. At the time Brenda was married and the couple's joint finances were taken up in furthering her husband's career, I was still being wild and free - a wild and free waitress this time - the tips just wouldn't stretch to funding a degree.

We picked up our tenuous thread in the mid-eighties when life at home with small children proved to be the less than satisfying experience we had always known it would be. Brenda's account of her return to study is interesting:

> 'I'd got two kids... couldn't afford baby-sitters, so he had to stay in, and I had to do something I could do on my own... So I thought, "there's the FE centre, and that's something I could do... What do I like doing best?" and I thought, "I like reading books... right I'll study literature..."'

The 'A' level literature led to the Open University Arts Foundation course which led to her degree in psychology. My own return grew from a need to affirm that there was a person underneath that pile of toys and nappies. I was motivated by an article in Cosmopolitan. Yes I know that this sounds ridiculous - plus ça change...

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ADULT EDUCATION AND LIFE HISTORY: SELF AS THE LEARNING CONTEXT

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St. Augustine, writing his **Confessions** (1951: 228) - surely a form of life history and learning - commented that:

> *... there be three times: a present of things past, a present of things present, and a present of things future*

and it is through an exploration of the (non-spiritual) significance of this that I will present this paper. In looking at the present of things past, I will recontextualise parts of my life history; in focusing on the present of things present, I will examine the relationships that I have started to identify between experience and learning which has encouraged me to recontextualise my past; and in considering the present of things future, I will prepare for future recontextualisation of the process of writing and presenting this paper. Through each of these present times, I hope to be able to examine the conference themes: the 'Self', will, I think, be self evident; 'Education' will derive from the Self as it learns and grows through the reflexive processes which I intend to describe; which leaves 'Language' which I will address first, in the context of the present of things past.

> *Lessons didn't happen, but I knew I could read. Teachers only existed up to knee high so when they - I don't know why but I have a memory of 'they' - came round to inspect work, I could only see legs and floral, swirly skirts.* (opening contribution to **Ourselves' Selves,** 1994)

In writing about my early life in school for the BSA project, I found myself thinking about earliest memories of myself as a learner, particularly of language, and realised that I had little access to memories of the processes that I know from the literature and for others' experiences to be highly problematic. At the age of seven, however, I was made aware of the contradictory nuances attached to competence and beyond:

> *While coming to the end of a class story in school, my eye fell on a colourful stamp on an envelope on the teacher's desk. I picked it up to admire it and at that moment, the teacher, a young woman whose name I can't remember, returned to her seat. "Did you read that?" she asked. "Yes," I replied. There was an open acknowledgement in my family that I could read well and I couldn't understand why she would think that I couldn't. She was furious, and as I realise now, very upset. I was unable, however, to understand her anger and never, I felt, recovered favour with her, even though she taught me for two more years.*

The ambiguity of this experience was only revealed to me as an adult; the implication of which is that for 15 years or more, until the time I first deliberately recalled this incident as a trainee teacher in College of Education, I was deprived of any interpretation, other than that of a seven-year-old, of my teacher's rationale for turning my world upside down.

If that, or any other incidents from my childhood experience of being 'taught' is typical, and I believe it is typical of the experience of so many people who do not achieve academic success or intellectual self esteem through formal schooling, the common features seem to be the way in which language fails to communicate intent. It seems through my reconstruction of the detail of my past that I see my competence as my inability: my success as my failure. I identify a mismatch between what I understood and what I was expected to understand, and a total disregard or misrepresentation of motive. Mary Stuart, describing the experience of a woman characterised as *mentally handicapped* quoted her as saying:

> *I was shocked that a society [could see] actions which are helpful to others, as a sign of being arrogant.* (Miller & Jones, 1993: 95)

I too am shocked as I read this: by the realisation that many times language is *incapable* of determining contemporaneous intent - as if the force of most utterance is dislocated by 'noise'; and that only through studied reconstruction, either as an individual or through a collective act, can any attempt be made to approach any of the intended meanings. And like a text, experience can be subjected to a variety of interpretations. As Robin Usher writes:

> *... experience is incoherent ... is doesn't come in neat packages of pre-determined meanings. This is not to say that it is meaningless, but simply that meaning is often multiple, at times contradictory, and although temporarily fixable always has an undecidability, an excess of meaning about it.* (Boud *et al*, 1993: 172)

At the moment, then, *this* is my present of things past.

My present of things present is mediated through a range of roles, some public: student (Ph.D., B.Sc.), teacher (M.Ed., Diploma), examiner (M.Ed., Diploma, National Curriculum Key Stage 3); and some private (partner, ex-husband, parent, step-parent, son). Some roles fit less comfortably into this public-private dichotomy and some of the writing/researching that I do, while focusing on the internal (i.e. the processing of my inner life) does have, indeed is intended to have, an external manifestation. Thus my contribution to the *Ourselves' Selves* project was an exploration of a personal, even intimate, past - subjected, albeit, to censorship at various levels of consciousness.

I am also teaching adult students and among the aims of the course is to explore both theoretically and experientially the notion of reflective practice: to encourage my students to engage in an examination of the turmoil they may experience as they confront their existing understandings with new insight. In order to facilitate this I had set up a dedicated email list called "Reflection on Adult Learning", designed to enable the class to share their concerns among themselves and also with a parallel class in a university in the United States, and had also encouraged them to spend some of their time writing journal entries in response from some prompts taken from Ira Progoff's book **At a Journal Workshop.**

On the whole, the procedure has not been particularly successful. Many students have struggled so much with an approach that placed them so firmly in control of the direction and nature of their learning that they became resistant to things that were not central to their perceived concerns, like writing journals, or sharing their anxieties in a semi-public forum. As one student (Speilhofer) identified, *"writing things down often simplifies and freezes* *experiences which by their nature are fluid and complex"*. Another student (Scott) demonstrated aspects of this fluidity and complexity in her journal:

> *Who could have guessed the depth of disorientation experienced by the various members of the group? This being the third week of the course ... it became clear that for many, this is a difficult approach to grasp. "Pandora opened her box and a cocktail of surprises emerged as creation took place." This is the closest I come at this stage to describing what is happening in this course. All manner of things have shown themselves already and yet there are still some unknown things lurking at the bottom of the box. ... All this gives me a thrill but like all thrills, it contains a fearful fascination - a desire to push on and explore the unknown but also a worry about the possible outcomes.*

Both of these women became part of a small group during the second term who engaged successfully in action learning around the issue of reflective behaviour in education. For many members of the group, however, anxiety levels remained high. One sub-group continually referred to the *pool of ignorance* that they surrounded and occasionally dipped a hesitant toe in each time they met. I wrote in my own journal about this interpretation and my concern about it:

> *... I underlined my view that it wasn't a pool of ignorance - rather a vast body of experience, talent, insight. I told them that what they had done was to trample round the outside of the pool turning its edges into a muddy swamp and generally making it an unattractive proposition.* (Journal entry 23rd February)

As this group of students struggled with this notion, I too was struggling with the rationale for the approach I had established, particularly during the second term. The use of action learning sets as a site for students' learning were chosen because of the potential that I saw in them to allow capable people to explore issues of common concern. The approach is based on the notion of confronting P (programmed knowledge) with Q (questioning insight) in order to generate, or perhaps more accurately, construct L (learning) (Revans, 1982). Seen as a collaborative venture within the context of real-life situations, it seemed to me to meet the needs of students who could apply some of the theoretical and practical insights gained during the first term and, as I have suggested, some of the students were at ease with this. One wrote:

> *The group is in control from the very beginning and it is the task of the facilitator to awaken them to this realisation, without invoking fear, resistance and defensiveness.* (Boschi)

but others continued to the end to resist, making their frustrations heard at the final evaluation session. Clearly, I had not managed, for some of the students at least, to awaken them without the fear, resistance and defensiveness. But I wonder if this is completely possible or desirable. Angela Brew (Boud *et al*, 1993: 88) called it *"unlearning"*.

> *When I am talking about unlearning, it must be clear that I am not talking about forgetting. Forgetting is like dropping a few stitches. Unlearning is like unravelling the whole and knitting it up again. [...] Unlearning means that what we know changes our world view, or an aspect of it, and we cannot reconstitute it in its original form.*

When I read this, I enjoyed the "aha" experience, because in confronting my own fears about my decisions about the course, I was beginning to come to the realisation that virtually all of learning is something that we as adults seek to resist. It was this that brought me to my final realisation which came from reading more of one student's work. She wrote in her module assignment: *"we must learn to learn from our experiences"*. (Boschi, 1994)

This simple comment made clear to me what Aitchinson and Graham (in Boud *et al*: 1989) wrote:

> *The only conclusion that can be reached is that we do not learn from experience. Experience has to be arrested, examined, analysed, considered and negotiated in order to shift it to knowledge.*

The assumption that I (and some of my students?) had been working on was that learning was happening to another self: that it was something "out there" to be inspected from a distance, and that may fit a reflective orientation. My realisation is perhaps prosaic, but the students who seemed to be the most resistant to taking that reflective stance were the ones who were "strangers" to those parts of themselves. Autobiography may have helped them to see the learner in themselves.

Nod Miller wrote: *"all social research constitutes an autobiography of the researcher"* (Miller & Jones, 1993: 88) and I was beginning to see aspects of my autobiography in much of my writing (see, for example Davis & Long, 1989). What I am now beginning to see, however, is that autobiography is also social research: in exploring my and others' learning processes I am continuing to develop the approach proposed by C. Wright Mills to *"capture what you experience and sort it out."* (quoted in Miller & Jones, 1993: 91) The difficulty arises from the fact that experience is multi-layered and complex and is capable of generating different meanings at different times. The task for my present of things future will be to untangle the various meanings which can be derived, and I see life history as an ideal medium through which to facilitate this.

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HIDDEN HISTORIES: THE LIFE JOURNEY EXERCISE

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The Inner Journey

Creativity consists largely of rearranging what we know
in order to find out what we do not know.[1]

It is generally accepted that some kind of creative activity can help individuals cope with the pressures and inconsistencies of modern life, but creative activity can also be a way to explore what we already know in order to help us perceive and understand what we do not know. Many of use seek for a greater understanding of ourselves, our relationships and our work, wanting to know what we have chosen to do the things we do, the underlying and determining influences and motives - searching for meaningfulness in our lives. By looking at what we do know of ourselves, and rearranging this knowledge in a creative way, we can perhaps being to discover more about what we do *not* know about ourselves.

The Life Journey exercise is a creative way of looking at what is known of one's own life history, in order to discover what is sometimes hidden, or rather not *consciously* known about it. The exercise attempts to bridge the 'gap' between what is consciously known about ourselves and what is unconsciously known. The unconscious is that part of the mind which is largely hidden or inaccessible to the conscious, reasoning intellect; but it is possible to activate the unconscious so that it reveals its knowledge. Jung[2] informs us that even though the unconscious is unknown, its 'contents' can become known to the conscious mind through intuition, dreams and image-making.

Our inheritance of Greek thought with its stress on syllogistic arguments and demonstrative proof has largely inhibited out understanding and we receive knowledge mainly by date received through sense experience and reason, both of which belong to the conscious mind. The conscious mind has the capacity to understand rationally that which is observable and directly measurable, but the unconscious and intuition *also* apprehend and understand. Intuition is a function that mediates perceptions in an unconscious way, a kind of instinctive apprehension. Jung[3] describes intuition as being neither sense perception, nor feeling, or intellectual inferences, even though intuition may at times appear in any of these forms. He reminds us that the human mind is more mature or integrated when *both* the conscious and the unconscious are appreciated and encouraged to function.[4] John Powell also stresses the need to use 'all of the human faculties, powers and talents' to enable individuals to become people who are 'fully alive'; Powell maintains that 'the first condition of growth is balances'.[5]

This focus on the importance of balance not only implies the need for both the conscious and unconscious to function but also the importance of exercising *both* regions of the brain: the left side that handles activities like logic, numbers, analysis, linearity and the rational ways of understanding and the right side which deals with imagination, colour, spatial awareness, music and other similar activities. Jung believes that out of the union of conscious and unconscious contents (or knowledge) new situations and conscious attitudes emerge, and he refers to this union (or balance) of opposites as the 'transcendent factor'. This is echoed in Maslow's[6] perception of a fully-actualised individual: that they are able to synthesise opposites and tolerate paradoxes, not out of necessity or from social pressure etc., but through their way of looking and understanding, so that they opt for 'both/and' seeing it as 'a richer way of living than either/or'.

Both/and

> *Everything in the unconscious seeks outward manifestation, and the personality too desires to evolve out of its unconscious conditions and to experience itself as a whole. I cannot employ the language of science to trace this process of growth in myself, for I cannot experience myself as a scientific problem.*[7]

The purpose of the Life Journey exercise is to assist individuals in making sense of the *whole* of their experiences. The exercise is experiential; it involves a non-verbal exploration of particular memories that have occurred during a person's life; colour and image-making replace oral and written expressions that are more commonly used for life history work. Colour and image-making provide a fresh way for adults to reflect on their lives, and to perceive levels of understanding about themselves (including emotions, motivations, learning, work, and relationships with others) not always accessible or apparent through the use of language. The exercise encourages individuals to get in touch with both the conscious and unconscious aspects of their life; and to see something of the process of their growth. Although it is called an 'exercise' it is not in any sense an exam or test; in this instance not only is the right side of the brain being 'flexed' but the unconscious too is being exercised in order to manifest its 'contents' and play its part in a more balanced thinking process. I like to visualise the functioning of the left and right sides of the brain, and the conscious and unconscious as a weight-lifter's barbell: the bar between the weights needs to be kept level - one side must not be allowed to weight down the other - or loss of balance will occur and the poor weight-lifter topple over.

Four general aspects of life are explored in the Life Journey exercise: *people, places, events* and *spirit*. Any persistent or significant memories relating to any of these four 'categories' are expressed on paper using colour and image, along with some indication of the individual's age at the time of the experience. The reason for the four 'categories' is their generality for all persons; meaning the contact, however remote or intense, we all have with them. They are representative or typical of the physical world that all individuals encounter, each person experiencing *people, places, events and the spiritual* in their own way, with their own uniquely different responses and reactions. All form the basis for relationship, or what we relate to. By *spirit* is meant the non-material aspect of our being: that which transcends or surpasses the temporal and material reality, including our ability to respond and relate to music, poetry, art and natural beauty. It is that part of us which is aware of the essence of our being. 15th century Teresa of Avila understood this aspect of the self to be the soul, which she described as 'interior castle' most people never explore.[8] Rudolph Otto[9] and many others, believe that receptivity to the possibility of a spiritual dimension is vital if individuals desire to perceive meaningfulness beyond superficialities and material constraints. And for Jung 'the only events in [his] life worth telling were those when the imperishable world irrupted into this transitory one. Memories of travels, people and surroundings are pale beside these interior happenings'.[10]

Wordless Dialogue and the 'transcendent factor'

The exercise is designed to encourage 'dual vision': this is a seeing past or beyond the 'surface' of the image, intuitively transcending the literal or concrete sense of what has been drawn - in this exercise images can 'steal a march' on words. Stephen Frosh[11] warns about the reduction of words to things; that the reduction of words or signifies to the concrete or material, gradually erodes the richness, depth and diversity of metaphor and symbolism, which have the role of enabling the thinking processes to be activated at a more profound or intuitive level.

The image-making exercise enables the participant to 'interview' his or her self by way of an inner dialogue or exploration of their 'interior castle'. This inner dialogue may not necessarily consist of words. Because feelings are expressed with images instead of words, some interpretation of the finished 'drawing' is necessary to derive greater insight and understanding. Although the image-making 'journey' is made along, further insights and interpretations can often be gained through discussion with another person.

Frosh draws attention to the ambiguous nature of the self, pointing out that the self is 'both an object of knowledge and contemplation as well as an experiencing subject'; he invites us to consider the relationship between *'I'* (the experiencing subject) and *self* (the object of contemplation). Although we can know ourselves by observation and reflection, we cannot know ourselves fully, simply because we are *in* 'ourselves (in our self). In other words although *'I'* and *'self'* are different or separate (because one is able to observe the other) they are also simultaneously one and the same: our identity - who we are.

The Life Journey exercise provides a creative and tangible framework for this interior exploration of the self. That the self has the capacity to experience *and* to be experienced by itself becomes evident when in retrospect, through the aid of the visual interpretations, the participant becomes more fully aware of some, if not all, significant experiences from the past that have initiated major changes in the development or unfolding of their life, even though at the time of the original experience(s) - often in childhood or adolescence - the individual may have been unaware of its impending influence.

Perhaps it is wise to point out that this interior journey into the individual's past, with the aid of image-making, is in no way to be likened to a new kind of 'therapy' called "Recovered Memory", where under the influence of hypnosis or drugs, patients are encouraged to "remember" occasions of abuse - allegedly suppressed. The Life Journey experience is certainly not intended to be used in this way; the exercise is essentially a private affair, a means for encouraging interior reflection (unprompted by *any* other means), somewhat like the keeping of a private diary or journal.

Any unease that may arise from insights gained through the exercise need to be taken into consideration by tutors who may wish to use the exercise with their students. The tutor's familiarity with the exercise, through exploring their own life journey (history) images, is of utmost importance. R.W.White reminds facilitators of the need to increase familiarity with their *own* personalities.[12] Because all adult students bring their personal histories with them into the learning situation (and all tutors and facilitators for that matter) it seems expedient that individual should have some insight into those areas of their own personal make-up that might hinder the full use of all their human faculties and thereby limit their possibilities to become more balanced, more 'fully alive'.

The Life Journey exercise acknowledges the possibility of a spiritual dimension or awareness of a higher reality as a vital principle in people, and it is suggested that neglect of the unconscious reduces the possibility to transcend phenomena so that any apprehension of the spiritual is weakened or eclipsed and a large part of our faculties may well be truncated, leaving us incomplete - only partly alive - our learning and education profoundly impoverished.

> *He looked at his own Soul*
> *with a Telescope. What seemed*
> *all irregular, he saw and*
> *shewed to be beautiful*
> *Constellations: and he added*
> *to the Consciousness hidden*
> *worlds within worlds.*
> (Coleridge)

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BIOGRAPHICAL RESEARCH IN ADULT EDUCATION CONTRADICTIONS AND RISKS IN USING NARRATIVE METHODS

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1. Presuppositions

The still growing interest in using biographical approaches in the field of social research (first for practitioners and now even for researchers) can be explained by the originality of the social and individual construct biography. This construct means two sides of life, emergence, subjectivity and structure, in other words, the object and the subject perspective. The theoretical concepts of biography try to describe and explore life-course in the connection of both of these aspects.

Biographical resources have also been used in the field of adult education to develop and analyse the processes of life-long learning. Many different ways and methods have been created and built up a "culture of biography", which asks for the certain circumstances of life-courses. A survey of the books and articles published in the last five years in this field shows a lot of empirical projects, but a lack of theoretical, structural and ethical discussions. It looks as if the strategic option of a biographical paradigm has only be grounded on empirical analyses. From the beginning there has been no clear program to develop, too many possibilities have been created in the therapy-related concepts, but also in all practice fields of adult education, even in association with political and vocational adult educational works. The conceptual task for today after this first period of action-orientated biographical approaches, should be in a strong and ambitious theoretical development of programmatic frameworks, in which all the contradictions, risks but also the chances and hopes can be discussed and analysed. This discussion is necessary even for biographical work to develop a new education-science view. We cannot force the historical, the social and individual modernization processes, if we are not able or willing to analyse our structural or ethical assumptions. Biography orientated research without such a meaning of self-reference is nearly inconceivable.

On the way to clarify the consequences of the work with life-histories, it is important to pronounce the dynamic and dialectic perspectives in the connection of structure and subjectivity. If we look to the structural conditions of individual life-courses, we need persons at both sides of this research, we need social actors to run the game of narration. In the next pages I want to show some of the problems in empirical biographical research.

2. The social actor

Working in biographical contexts, maybe as an adult educator, as a social-worker or a therapist, we have to realize, that the lines in which we have to work are always dynamic structures, without static modes. Individuals evidently have to strike a balance between objective requirements and subjective idiosyncrasies, so we have to be sensible for the interpretations of life in every special case. In empirical research we always work with several levels, which are dominated by the terms of emotionality, memory, relationship and time. This is quite normal for all social work, but in using biographical approaches, especially in using narrative methods, it is necessary to think about the social rules in this field. Beyond methodological reflections I want to face some ethical consequences in doing biographical research. This scientific focus (the re-construction of life-courses) is quite different to the task of practitioners, who are looking for settings to develop and change the real situation of the people they work with. So I want to outline and elaborate three theses:

Thesis 1: Biographical methods tempt to ignore the lines between intra- and interindividual reflection

One of the critical points and experiences in using biographical methods in social research is the way in which we handle the "biographical material", the stories of lived life. We, as researchers, but also as thinking and hoping people, have to deal with emotions and feelings in the processes of making a story talk. The narrative structure of experience is in many ways dependent upon the relationship between researcher and narrator. In every case of looking into another's life we have to answer a question of the emotional relation to this story. Methodological caution tries to make us handle a lot of these sensible situations in dealing with experiences, fantasies and emotions. But there always exist moments in which we are emotionally involved in narrative relations. We cannot be sure in which way and with what intensity people find and tell their story. In the same way we, as researchers, have to be careful of our individual reaction, when we will be torn in new social contexts. Beyond methodological considerations I want to show some ethical and self reflecting aspects in using biographical methods (in this case as a research-method for the (re-)construction of life-course.

Case 1: Sabine and Gertrud

Sabine and Gertrud have been participants in a research-seminar using biographical methods. After learning some theoretical groundings in interpretative analysis and the sociology of deviant groups in society, they decided to explore the processes of becoming a member in a group of homeless. They looked for the "empirical material" and it was easy to locate a group of homeless who they contacted. After first talks in the street they tried to make a narrative interview, but from that time on there was a growing feeling of indisposition and fear in both actings. Later they told me, they felt like spies, like social-policeman, like asking-machines, which wanted to change human beings in spoken material. And there was also a gap between their ways of seeing the world and the world of the homeless. The confusion was total, when the homeless asked them, to tell something about their lives, about being a young female student in this town. They tried to answer but with each word they felt more and more the ridiculous situation in which they were caught. The methodological protective shield learned at university was no longer a real help. The other day, they told me the whole story and we discussed it. They finished their empirical work and wrote an article about their field-experiences. But the story did not end with this paper. Two days later, they met one of the homeless in the street, who asked them for some money. Sabine and Gertrud could not say no, and from that time, they were afraid of meeting him again. They avoided all the places where the homeless could be, and after two months Sabine left Graz, went to Vienna to finish her study. Gertrud was not longer sure to become a social scientist, she decided to become a social worker.

Thesis 2: Biographical approaches to life-courses have the tendency to be therapeutical

Concepts focusing on situations of biographical crises often use exactly the same setting with different intentions. If we compare the psychotherapeutic and the biographical setting it seems to people very similar. Both focus on the perspectives of memory, reflection, narration and deal with the symbols and possibilities of language. They build on the individual retrospective of life-stories and try find out the specific forms of biographically accumulated experience in a social context. Not the event is important in both ways but the biography on which it impacts. This setting is the picture, the frame we present people, when we work with biographical methods, and we should not be astonished, if people want to "heal" their stories in our contexts. The lines between learning, doing research and healing in this field is not clear and was prolematic. Behind the dim contours of an over-expanded therapeutic movement there lies the area of biographical methods in adult education, which can make a lot of confusion in the practical situations.

Case 2: Mrs Smith

Mrs Smith was one of my interview-partners in a project about the biographical perspectives in adult education. She came to me through an advertisement. Even on the telephone she told me, that I "come soon in time to reflect her critical situation in her life". This "warning" in my ears I told her before the interview very carefully about the matter and the circumstances of my work, and that this setting is no therapeutic one. She agreed but in the interview she always tried to make her story workable in a therapeutical way. She wanted to find some kind of solution, reflection in dialogue and forced me to ask therapeutic questions. She was engaged in therapeutic sessions some years ago and she found all the main topics of this setting in our interview. She knew, that changes in therapeutic sessions happens in dialogue, in the narration of stories. And now she wanted to make it in the same way again. Often she told me, she wanted to have some profit from this interview, and this profit could be grounded in my ability to discover the true meaning of her story. Even when I repeated the focus of my work, Mrs Smith always came back to the same wish. Her emotional acceptance to active participation in the interview was totally connected with the setting and the meaning of a client-therapist-relationship. This interview (more than one hour) was a fight against the wishes for helping, for healing. Nearly in the middle of this talk I made Mrs Smith an offer that we could discuss her problems after the interview in a cafe, we actually did. In this following two hours, Mrs Smith asked me a lot of things and I told her something of my way to handle my problems. At the end she was satisfied and in the next weeks she told me by phone, that she started a psychotherapy which she left after three sessions. Four weeks long she called me up at university, told me her problems than she suddenly stopped. I don't know what happened.

This is only one example for the fuzziness of biographical research and therapy. These methods are grounded in biography-guided education and living processes. The work with the "inner reality" has a big tendency to therapeutic senses and cannot be fixed by methodological caution. The contract between the researcher and the narrator is build on thin ice, the meaning of the setting can change in various dimensions. The process of narration does not exclusively lead to "empirical material" in a neutral form. For social research it is important to point out the function of narration and interpretation.

Thesis 3: The social role of researchers has to be fixed only in the social process of research

Grounded in case 2, I want to discuss another dimension in using biographical methods: the incomplete role of researchers. This means the circumstances in which we make our contact to the research-field. The nearer we get in touch with the empirical field, the more subjective dimensions are involved in our work. A questionnaire has a great barrier between the subjects, but in the perspectives of biography-guided research we have to handle our "broken identity" in face to, the subject of narration. This is what I mean by social incompleteness of the researchers role. We are in the position of asking experts, but in the processes of narration the narrators are the experts of their stories. On the other hand, the situation of narration is highly dominated by emotionality, in which we should think about our "management" of feelings and reflections. It is important, which role we can accept. Are we animaters of narration, story-dealers, controllers, story-destroyers? In all cases of working with life-stories we have the responsibility for the situations in which the stories will be told. That means, that our role in the setting has be clarified in the process of narration. We won't be successful and responsible in working without that social dimension, because the face to face interaction can never be planned in all its possibilities.

3. Consequences

This short list of points shows some of the fundamental unquestioned structural problems in using biographical methods in adult education. This is my point of view. The scope of problems extends from individual-therapy to the social role of users in the horizons of their practical work. If we want to clarify our position in that field we should ask for the reflected competences which we need to do responsible work. If narration is our main topic in professional biographical work which can communicate the complexity of social structure, we also have to ask for our frames of communication in the research society. Even in ethical refences we should pronounce our possibilities to attach this kind of knowledge to the stocks of social science. Beyond diagnostic strategies (like medicine) we have to be careful to understand the tension between meaning and language, between continuity and discontinuity in "historical life-courses". Three competences should be necessary for this kind of work:

Social competence

We should clarify our role as an animator of narration in the risks and options of this method. Methodological caution is needed but not enough in the social process of building up reality in interviews. The personal balance handles the possibilities for the story.

Competence in social research

Narration seems to be an universal method for self-actualization in social dimensions. What we need is sensibility in the"interpretative paradigm", in the processes of constructing world by language. At a highly abstract level we have to strike a balance between objective requirements and subjective idiosyncrasies.

Ethical competence

This means the balance between method and subject, individual and system, self and context. We should always care about the resources of emotion, confidence and appreciation. My personal consequences of these topics are clear. I prefer biographical research as teamwork. Only in the different connections and views of a team I can handle the mechanism of being a responsible researcher. The relations between researchers, working in the same field, with different eyes and ears could be one solution for the "biographical question" and could help to establish a culture of learning and reflecting even in social research.

NEW METHODS FOR LIFE COURSE ANALYSIS OF STUDENTS' LIVES

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Introduction

Educational evaluation is often narrowly focused on the educational background of students, the course itself, and outcomes defined as successful completion. Courses tend to be seen only in relation to students' educational careers, rarely is a course viewed in the full context of their lives. This context includes the multiple and interacting 'careers' in other areas of their lives - personal relationships, childcare, employment, health, leisure, social, as well as education, and the wider sociohistorical context. Life course analysis enables an examination of the place and influence of a course in students' lives, the interaction between what is happening in their lives and the course itself, and the influence of the course on their subsequent activities. It emphasises the importance of the changing socioeconomic context and how opportunities and constraints affect and have affected options and activities over time.

Life Histories

Life course analysis involves the presentation and examination of life histories. A life history can be defined as 'a deliberate attempt to define the growth of a person in a cultural milieu and to make theoretical sense of it' (Dollard, 1935:3). Plummer (1983:103) provides a typology of the various types of life history documents. In essence this consists of two dimensions:

1. The number of people studied - concentration on a single individual or a number of individuals.

2. The scope of the lives covered - the extent that the history is comprehensive or focuses on a particular topic

This framework defines the options for collecting life histories which are shown by the four points in figure 1 below:

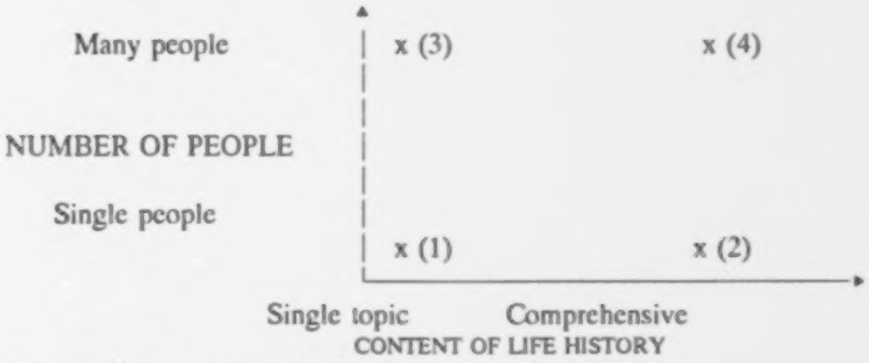


Figure 1 Life history options based on Plummer's typology

It would be possible to concentrate on one student and collect a comprehensive life history (ie. 2 above). Alternatively more limited life histories could be collected from a number of students (ie.3). Option 4 would require a lot of time to collect and analyse and option 1 would yield little data. Much of Plummer's discussion on methodology (Plummer, 1983: ch.5) refers to in-depth, open-ended interviews conducted over a number of sessions in which a single informant provides biographic details of their past and current life (ie.2 above).

According to Rosenmayr (1982) using open-ended biographical methods with a number of individuals has the following limitations:

1. The lack of reliability due to interviewers giving different emphasis between everyday occurrences and value statements (ie. descriptive versus evaluative).

2. Paucity of statements obtained (ie. lack of descriptive data).

3. Repetitiveness of personal narrative.

4. Other researchers have moved from open-ended methods to include the use of questionnaires.

Further justification for the combination of open-ended and more closed questions is provided by Cornwell (1984: 16) in her study of women's lives, she argues that different types of questions give rise to public or private accounts - 'public accounts are sets of meanings in common social currency that reproduce and legitimate the assumptions people take for granted about the nature of social reality' (p.15). A private account is the way in which a person 'would respond if thinking only what he and the people he knows directly would think and do' (she quotes Douglas, 1971:242). 'Private accounts spring directly from the personal experience and from the thoughts and feelings accompanying it' (p.16). She points out that open and closed questions affect interviewee control and the production of private or public accounts.

Elder (1978:21) recommends Dailey's Assessment of Lives (1971) as 'the most thorough current source' which provides an overview of methods for using life histories in the study of lives. Dailey states that given the usual readiness to talk about one's life, most informants will give an acceptable account within an hour and a searching account within half a day. He echoes the points made by Rosenmayr above in saying that 'when a person tells his history... he produces a long string of material in which actual events, confusing circumstances, evaluative judgements, and objective facts are intermingled'. What is needed is an 'interrogation outline or written document to help order the string of information so that the data begin to flow in a more coherent manner' (pp.48-54).

Although Dailey mentions that in special circumstances it may be possible to instruct groups of people to prepare their life histories, he gives particular attention to the development of life history for one individual (ie. one-to-one). A series of questions are used which begin by probing the person's present view of their situation and work back to a more complete picture of their life history. The first question he uses is 'Tell me about your life?' which is elaborated upon in several ways. Later questions focus on key episodes in each year of life. This is followed by probing for periods and areas of life and about people which may have been left out. Finally he asks questions about the person's view of their future. He recommends verbatim recording of narrative, but points out that this may eventually be between 5,000 and 20,000 words. The task for the interviewer following this method is therefore extremely demanding.

A more manageable technique was developed by Johnson et al. (1981) who used an Interview Document to collect and record life history data from elderly people and to evaluate a particular intervention - a meals-on-wheels service. The Interview Document includes open-ended 'starter' questions and more closed and factual 'topic' lists and combines biographical and questionnaire methods. Di Gregorio (1986: 140) explains that the Interview Document combines qualitative and quantitative elements in starter questions and topic lists for each of eight sections or themes which roughly correspond to the chronology of an individual's life. Each section begins with two to five starter questions.

A special feature of this methodology, which is shared by Dailey, is that in the open-ended parts of the Interview Document the interviewer writes down what the interviewee says. In comparison to tape recording this reduces the amount of data collected and focuses the interview onto important details. Using this method a reasonably detailed life history can be collected in an hour and a half.

The Interview Document

The Interview Document developed for the study conducted by Farnes (1990) was based on that used by Johnson et al. (1981). Open-ended starter questions covered the main areas of students' life histories and topic list items were expressed as questions designed to provide further information on the main events and details of the student's life. The section on Changes focused on students' involvement in and reactions to the OU Community Education courses. In common with the other sections this began with open-ended starter questions to encourage students to say what the courses meant to them. This was followed by more systematic probing using questions to explore whether the courses had helped in particular areas of their lives.

The sequence in which the interview proceeded was to begin with starter questions on students' Childhood and Education, then to move to starter questions in the next section and so on until all sections had been completed. Following this topic questions dealing with the courses in the Changes section were used to fill in and expand on what had been said in response to the starter questions. When these topic questions had been covered the interviewer returned to the earlier sections and checked that information relating to the topic questions had been obtained and if not asked specific questions. The main aim was for students to tell their life story and to talk about the courses in their own words rather than to give short answers to formal questioning.

Analysis of Life Histories

Students told their life histories and gave comments on the courses in one-to-one sessions with an interviewer who wrote down their words in the Interview Document. These were transcribed into a computer file and then analysed to identify the key dates in each student's life which were placed in a 'datafile'.

The datafile for each student included dates for: living with a partner, marriage and separation, leaving school, starting full-time and part-time employment, leaving jobs, begin next job etc, birth of children, when OU and other courses were studied, start and end of community activities and responsibilities, health problems, periods of partners' unemployment, etc. All dates are rounded to the beginning of a month. Many of the dates are collected and recorded in the interview, but dates often have to be inferred, this is partly due to the design of the Interview Document and the topic questions where ages are asked for when this is likely to be easier for the student, but also due to students' difficulties in remembering accurate dates, for example of job changes, moving house, partners' unemployment and so on.

When completing the topic questions Interviewers have to make judgements on the spot as to whether it is worth probing for a more accurate date, or whether this would be counterproductive for their rapport with the student.

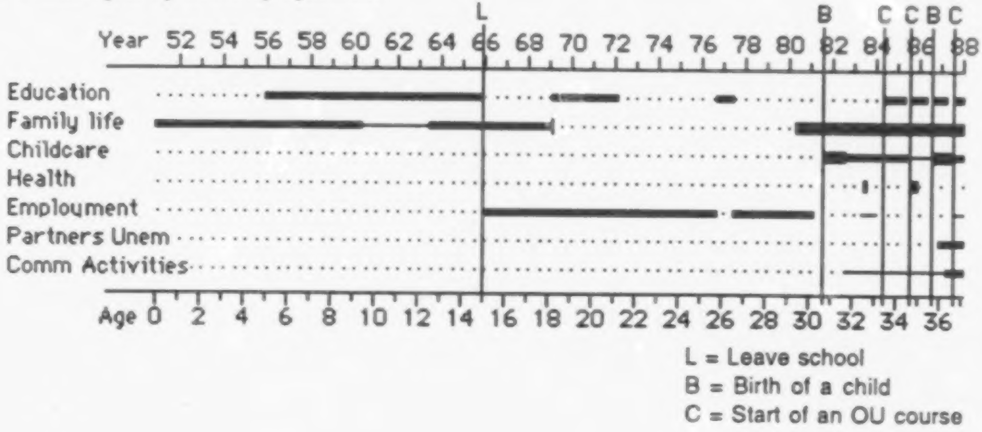
The data can be organised into the main areas of students' lives. These areas have also been termed: 'role domains' (Elder 1978: 23), 'life roles' (Super, 1980: 289), 'life areas' (Aslanian and Brickell, 1980: 53), life event 'contexts' (Reese and Smyer, 1983: 8), It was recognised that 'when presenting a person's life schematically, one has to make a somewhat arbitrary decision about which data to include and which to omit' (Buhler and Goldenberg, 1968: 59). The areas of life used in the study were:

1. education
2. family/marital life
3. childcare
4. health
5. employment
6. partner's unemployment
7. community activities
8. social life

Presentation of lifelines

To display the data on students' lives the graphic presentation technique described by Buhler and Goldenberg (1968: 60) to show the structure of life histories, and the computer graphic display used by Dex (1984: 8) to present women's work histories, were adapted. Also drawn upon was Super's (1980: 291) diagram which shows progress through various roles in life. Thus a set of lifelines for each student shows when she left school and her participation in OU and other courses, when she left her parent's home and began living with a partner and if it ended when; when her children were born; her health in terms of the times and approximate durations of illnesses and depression; periods of part and full-time employment; the periods when her partner (if she had one) was unemployed; her involvement in community activities as a member of local groups and organisations and as having a position of responsibility in these. Not shown as a separate line are changes in the students' social networks. An example of one student's set of lifelines is shown as chart 1 below.

Chart 1 Example of a set of lifelines.



The juxtaposition of the lifelines enables actual or possible interactions between the careers of this student to be identified. In particular around the time of the OU courses we can see that:

1. She began her first OU course in 1984 after she finished her first part-time employment, after her miscarriage, when her first child was nearly three and when she was involved in the Mother and Toddler club (employment - health - childcare - community - education careers).

2. Between the second and third OU course (1985-87) she had another child; her husband became unemployed; she took on a community responsibility; and began a computer studies course (education - childcare - husband's unemployment - community - further education).

3. Around the time she started the third course (1987) she began part-time employment as a playleader (education - employment).

While these interactions are suggestive the nature of the linkages require further consideration. In particular, changes in careers and the help provided by OU courses can be examined. She reported that the courses helped her cope with her daughter's grief and other aspects of childcare; get the playleading job; go onto other OU courses; use what she learnt in her community activities; make close friends; and be more patient and relaxed.

Detailed life course analysis of 60 OU Community Education students living in areas of multiple deprivation in Glasgow (Farnes, 1990) show that the influence and helpfulness of the courses is related to where they are in their various careers. Also there is a close correlation (r=0.64) between the numbers of areas in which there were changes in their lives and the number of areas that the courses were helpful. Those with more changes around the time of the courses and afterwards find the courses more helpful. Furthermore changes across all areas of their lives around the time they took the courses and afterwards appear related to their social and economic instability. Those with more instability have and make more changes and find the courses more helpful. The courses benefit those who are most disadvantaged in line with the objectives of Strathclyde Regional Council's Social Strategy. A resource based model is proposed (Farnes, 1988, 1992) which attempts to explain why those with least resources have more changes in their lives and receive more help from the courses; how this relates to their social and economic status and context; and the role of central and local government (Farnes, 1993).

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STARTING A PERSONAL PROFILE: EDUCATIONAL AUTOBIOGRAPHIES OF TEACHER TRAINEES

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This paper will be presented in the form of a workshop. Participants will be asked to compare transcripts of life histories written by primary teacher trainees from the 1993-4 cohort, and the prospective 1994-5 intake. The workshop approach is particularly appropriate for life history work because of the three-way interactive process involved between the researcher, the workshop members and the writers. It will enable the readers to make an active construction of meaning from the text. In addition, the comparative data will only become available immediately before the conference, so that it will be as new to the researcher as the audience; in this way, a mutual discovery and interpretation will be possible.

On the Primary PGCE course, educational autobiographies are a required but unassessed assignment, written in the summer before trainees start the course. They are used by personal tutors to discover background information about the students, and in particular to identify any potential problems that may arise during the year, linked to the trainees' previous history. From the trainees' point of view, the life histories introduce the reflexive approach which underlies the course, and through which the development of a reflective practitioner is encouraged (Schon 1983, Humm 1987). Students are asked to undertake a series of self-evaluations during the year, in order to chart their progress and analyze the process of change from trainee to fully-fledged teacher. These evaluations build up to a personal profile for each student, which are also added to by the profiles written by school and university tutors at key assessment points.

The autobiographies so far have been unfocused and open-ended. Students tend to concentrate on their school experiences, and include aspects such as their most striking memories, influential teachers (for good or ill), and problems encountered in their learning. Sometimes personal details are included, for example, family break up or bereavement, but usually only if these have impinged on their education. In contrast, very little attention is given to post-school experiences, or to learning that takes place outside school.

Given that two-thirds of the course intake are mature students (25 years and over), who are often making a change of career, and who therefore bring a wealth of experience from work in their former professions (such as social work, nursing, business), not to mention their unpaid experience as partners, the life histories submitted barely tap the skills and knowledge that they bring to teaching. Now that the government has introduced new criteria for primary teacher training, including a list of competencies that newly qualified teachers have to acquire (DFE 14/94), it is an appropriate time to rethink and reshape the autobiographies.

The life histories to be written during the summer of 1994 will therefore be more clearly focused, in order to highlight the individual achievements already made by prospective trainees, and to identify the skills, knowledge and experience they already possess. Students will be asked to write about all their educational experiences, not just those which were school-based; early childhood learning will therefore form only a small part of the whole. In addition, they will be asked to think about their lives in a more thematic way, in order to clarify and underline relevant skills and abilities. For example, creative interests and talents will be one possible focus; communication skills another, or organisational abilities. The trainees will be asked to provide as much evidence as possible of these areas, so that accomplishments can be clearly demonstrated.

In this way it is hoped that, as well as fulfilling new government requirements, the autobiographies will become a more valuable and valued resource for both tutors and students, providing a positive celebration at the start of the course, and making more sense of the reflective, profiling approach that is a central underlying principle.

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HISTORIES AND HOROSCOPES: THE ETHNOGRAPHER AS FORTUNETELLER

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1. Introduction

In recent years, there has been a trend toward looking more closely and questioningly at the methods we use to elicit personal histories, particularly through interviews (see, for example Stanley and Morgan, 1993; Briggs, 1986). The quote above is an example of what happened when we asked people about their perceptions of the interviews they had given us as part of an ethnographic research project exploring personal histories of literacy and learning.

We met with a wide range of reactions to what we were doing. Despite the interviewer's consistent attempts to explain the idea behind the research, it was clear that the people who agreed to take part heard this explanation in different ways and proceeded to develop different relationships to the research based on their own purposes and understandings of it.

In this paper, I want to explore what we learned from this experience about how people interpret and make sense of the activities and procedures we call "researching life history". What agendas of their own do people bring to the research? How does the research process fit into these and serve them?

I begin by explaining the purpose and methods of the research as we, the research team, understood them. I then describe some of the reactions of participants to this process and what this can tell us about what is going on when we set out to research personal histories.

2. What we did and why

In the course of a 4 year ESRC funded project we called "The Literacy in the Community Project" we collected literacy life histories, talking to people about the values, meanings and practices that constitute their experience of reading and writing, both inside and outside of formal education. The data reported in this paper are just one part of the larger project which we have written about elsewhere (see for example Barton and Padmore, 1991).

We started off by interviewing 20 adults who had been studying in adult basic education and access groups in the local adult college. The member of our research team who carried out most of the interviews had been a teacher at this college and was well-known to most people in the group.

We also carried out 14 in-depth case studies of adults from one neighbourhood who we contacted by means of a door-to-door survey. We introduced our study as being about how people find out about local information and then, more specifically, as being about how people use reading and writing in their everyday lives. The interviewer was known slightly by some of the members of this group as a parent with children at a local school, and as a resident of a nearby neighbourhood.

Explaining what we were doing was difficult since we wanted to disentangle "literacy" from "education" in order to explore everyday practices and informal learning. Inevitably, however, people made this link quite strongly, particularly those whom we had met through the college. It was only by encouraging them to talk in a broader way about their lives and networks that we could move away from the educational discourse in which literacy is embedded. Over time we encouraged people to talk more and more freely about their lives and "ruling passions".

The original interest and impetus for this research came from us, the research team, but during the last phase of the project we introduced elements of collaboration into our work with a selected sample of people from each of the two groups - adult students and adults from the community.

We did this in several ways:

a) We shared our interpretation of the findings, returning samples of interview transcripts and samples of our writing to interviewees.
b) We asked people to write their own pen sketch describing themselves.
c) We asked for peoples understandings of what we were doing in the research, including their attitude towards and experience of the university where we were based.

We did these things because we are trying to understand people's own vernacular theories of literacy and we therefore needed to engage with their interpretations of the project. We also found it difficult and ethically problematic to write descriptions of people ourselves. We wanted people to have the opportunity to author their own descriptions of themselves.

3. Reactions and Outcomes

People reacted in very different ways to our invitations to collaborate. Some found it more difficult than others and some were more interested than others. Reactions to the transcripts, for example, ranged from total fascination, enjoyment and serious re-reading of the content, to complete lack of interest in the idea of reading about a conversation that was now past history. Some people were horrified by the sight of their spoken Lancashire dialect on the page while others were pleased by its authenticity. In a number of cases this provoked revealing comments about their perceptions of the difference between spoken and written language.

On the whole, people were interested in reading what we had written about them. The most extreme example is from Rita, who had shown very little interest in the transcript of her interviews:

> "Rita was the only person to snatch the themes from me and read them straight through. She stood in the centre of the carpet, smiling as she read them. The difference between her reaction to my writing about her, and her words on the short transcript was remarkable. Rita read this like a story (I felt) and she enjoyed it, immediately called Hayley (her daughter) to read it too. She was really animated but not in the rather tense way she often is. I think she was really pleased that someone had bothered to write about her."

People were sometimes critical of the language in which we had expressed the themes, but rarely disagreed with the content, preferring to elaborate and endorse them. This took us by surprise as we had been extremely nervous about offering back what we had written and had expected disagreement.

People found it difficult to produce a pen sketch of themselves and many were at a loss as to how to do it, even though they were willing to try. In the end, the interviewer resorted to many different strategies to elicit them: Harry dictated his and the interviewer wrote it down. Shirley wrote hers as a series of responses to the themes we had identified. June wrote hers as if it were an advertisement sent to a dating agency.

In their pen-sketches people talked about their relationships with other people; their family background; their hobbies and pastimes; their hopes and dreams ("what I wish I would be like"); their attitudes to life and people (tapping into some common folk-themes such as "I take life easily, always look on the bright side....."). They made a crucial distinction between how they see themselves and how others see them, slipping back and forward between the two in their descriptions:

At each step of our collaboration, then, we became aware that we were asking for something more complex and problematic than we had first thought. The reactions we met with offer us a rich resource which we could explore in a number of ways. In the rest of this paper I want to focus on just two aspects that seem fundamental ones: Firstly, what sense were people making of the research process and the researcher's role? Secondly, what uses did the research serve for the people who agreed to take part, since these purposes were evidently not identical to our own?

4. Making Sense of the Research Process

One helpful idea for thinking about these issues is offered by Silverman (1993) where he discusses the different contexts in life where people experience the same kind of activity - such as an interview, hearing your own words recorded or seeing them transcribed, giving a summary account of yourself, receiving feed back about how others see you. People will try to situate the activities involved in the research relationship among these contexts and use them to frame and make sense of what is going on:

> "...such activities as observation and interviewing are not unique to social researchers. For instance, as Foucault (1977) has noted, the observation of the prisoner has been at the heart of modern prison reform, while the method of questioning used in the interview reproduces many of the features of the Catholic confessional or the psychoanalytic consultation. Its pervasiveness is reflected by the centrality of the interview study in so much contemporary social research....One possible reason for this may not derive from methodological considerations. Think, for instance, of how much interviews are a central feature of mass media products, from "talk shows" to "celebrity interviews". Perhaps we all live in what might be called an 'interview society' in which interviews seem central to making sense of our lives. " (Silverman, 1993. p 19)

Amongst the people we were working with, there were many different contexts which they had experience of and which they could draw on to make sense of different aspects of the research process. For example, they had heard their own recorded voices in making taped letters to correspondents abroad; described their own experiences in personal letter writing, diaries and c.v.'s; been interviewed by the unemployment services, employers, doctors and counsellors; read other peoples' (auto)biographies; proof read letters and other contributions that they had written for public newsletters/newspapers.

In some cases people specifically mentioned these activities as being "like" the experience of the research, and used them as analogies to explain their understandings to the interviewer.

It became obvious that those adults who had been part of adult education groups and knew of our interviewer's experience as a teacher, used this as a strong interpretative frame for the research, even where such shared experiences were long in the past. In this sense, the interviews with the second group of adults in the community are more unpredictable and revealing of their own agendas outside of education.

5. Some Different Understandings of the Research process.

What follows are some of the ways in which people interacted with the researcher. We were aware of differences between people, but sometimes more than one orientation was evident in a given relationship. The interviewer, for her part, had a distinct sense of the kind of relationship she had with individual interviewees.

STRANGER ON THE TRAIN

In a number of cases there was an element of the research interview serving as a place apart from everyday networks and concerns, where things could be said and stories told to a sympathetic, non-evaluative ear and without any of the usual interpersonal consequences. As a research team we have identified this as the "stranger on the train" approach. Though it was never named as such by any of the people we worked with the interviewer sometimes had an acute sense of being used in this way by interviewees. An example of this was June, who told many stories of marital conflict and family problems that were so close to home that it would have been difficult, if not impossible, to talk them through with the people involved. The interviewer was uncomfortably aware of her role as confidant and confessor, as someone who acted as a distraction from everyday worries and enabled June to unburden herself. This is apparent from her diary notes:

> I was very conscious when I got up to go, that June could have talked longer..... When I said "I'll get in touch in a few weeks", I think she realised that it was coming to an end. And she said "I'll really miss this when it finishes. I enjoy this." And I got the feeling that she meant that she needed it. I'm fairly sure now that she tells me... tells the tape recorder an awful lot of things that she doesn't tell anybody else. And I'm worried about her having become dependant on this. I'm not sure what to do about it.

GHOST WRITER

Two people made the explicit analogy with ghostwriting, which is an interesting one in the light of its association with stardom and media fame. One of the people who mentioned this (see quote at the start of the paper) was an avid fan of popular comedy and music and had for a number of years corresponded with two media celebrities. It is possible that there is a connection between Cliff's long-standing interest in the glamorous world of show business and his motivation for taking part in our project: Does it make him feel like a celebrity himself, like the stars that he corresponds with and has seen interviewed on the television?

Related to the idea of "ghost-writing" are many other comments about how it feels to read about yourself through someone else's words. You recognise yourself and yet you don't. The facts are there, but the force with which they are expressed changes, sometimes for better, sometimes for the worse.

> Jun: That makes it sound like another person... no, it doesn't sound like another person.... I know it is me and when I look at it and I'm reading it, I can say "It is me". But I wouldn't have put that. I would have said "Well, I care a lot about animals and I'm interested in nature... " But I wouldn't have thought... yes I do care deeply. But when you put it there, I know, yeah, I do.

Some people felt the researchers writing about them made them sound too serious and intelligent. Others felt their transcribed words represented them badly and showed them up as being "thick" or "ignorant". Although an interviewee could feel uncomfortable about this, the issue was not one of assessing whether the description was "right" or not but of confronting yourself as others see you:

> Interviewer: ....I didn't think I'd really got the right to describe people. Because you know what you're like and....
>
> Jun: Do you know what you're like yourself though? I mean I think, well, you think you know yourself, other people don't think the same do they?

RESEARCHER AS FORTUNE TELLER

It was common amongst the adults we interviewed to view the research process as **imposing** order or pattern on their lives rather than as simply reflecting self-evident truths about themselves that they could correct, or facts that could be misrepresented. The analogy Cliff uses, of the researcher as fortune teller, casting horoscopes, brilliantly captures the way which people received our writing about them as "revelatory" rather than "right or wrong":

> Interviewer: Did you think it sounded like you? Do you recognise yourself from those descriptions?
>
> Cliff: Yeah I think so. If somebody had given me this and said "What do you think of this?", you know, I would have probably said to myself "If this had been in the form of a horoscope or something..." I would have said "By jove, that nearly fits in to the way I am", you know... I don't know whether sometimes you can read into things that you think ought to be there, you know. Like horoscopes, you know, you can go "Oh, that is me". But it's because it's how you want it to be or what I don't know. But yeah. It's quite good is this.

While she doesn't use the analogy explicitly, June also expresses this feeling of recognising a new light on herself in much the same away that you might react to having your horoscope or fortune told:

> June: All the facts and everything - that's right. But when you say things like "I deeply care about things", you know, I've never really thought about it. You know, I mean it's made me think "Gosh... well it's right". You know, it is right but I've never, ever thought about it. (laughing)

RESEARCHER AS COUNSELLOR

Elements of the counselling relationship entered into several of our interviews. In most cases the "therapeutic" aspects of the research were referred to appreciatively and light-heartedly as offering welcome opportunities to reflect, and indulge in self-analysis with a view to making change happen. Some people commented very explicitly on the way in which the interview process had caused them to reflect on change in their lives, putting things into a different perspective:

> Lynne: ..It's made me sit down and analyse myself a little bit this. (laughing) You know, who am I? What am I? What do I want to really do?

> Int: What made you get that book("The Confident Woman")? Is it a library book?
>
> Lyn: Actually I think it was after our last conversation. I went out, I thought: "I'm going to try and be more positive".

It seemed that the non-judgmental and empathetic style that the interviewer had adopted, encouraged people to re-assess themselves and question the lack of confidence they often expressed in their own abilities.

In the case of one person, Eddie, the research interviews co-incided with a time when long-standing problems came to a head, involving the legal and psychiatric services and a major reassessment of his life and self-image. We realised that the process of speaking/reading your own words and thereby having them reflected back to you is very similar to techniques employed in counselling to promote personal change. We became worried by the potential power of this process and we felt out of control of it. For this reason we decided not pursue the research with this person.

RE-MEMBERING THE PAST

Among some of the people we interviewed, reflecting on the past and making sense of it was evidently part of what the research prompted - or perhaps fit into. An clear example of this is Harry, a 72 year old man, who during the interviews had expressed worry and dislike of writing. He had never done anything that could formally be called "reminiscence " or "writing a life history". Whilst his wife had researched the family tree, he said he was uninterested in this. What quickly became apparent however, when we asked him about his reading habits, was a voracious appetite for books which offered "authentic" accounts of war-time experiences. His interest in making sense of his own experience during the war years infused many of the interviews. His daughter, talking of her own husband's interest in a book Harry had lent him, succinctly summed up the motivation behind this:

> " Al(her husband) was in the paratroopers...he needs to remember. It's part of history and its part of his life that's not going to go away..it needs going over. It's only natural..no use pretending it never happened. War is war. Al was a Sargeant so you know...responsibility and that."
>
> She turned back to Harry and continued.
>
> "And the memories, you know, Harry, seeing men he was with in there, reading about them...that's something that is..seeing them in print . No, he's not put it down."

By the end of the project, Harry had started writing his own war-time memoirs for publication in a newsletter. The interviewer was delighted with this transformation, from writing expressed as difficulty and worry, to writing as pleasure.

RESEARCHER AS EDUCATOR

This was a powerful mediator of the research process in our project, particularly for adults who had experience of literacy learning at college. The educational context which people drew on in making sense of the research included at least three elements:

- the expectation/experience of getting evaluative feedback on your performance

- a feeling of constantly being tested and assessed and possibly failing in some way - being found not to measure up

- the experience of proofing and editing your own writing so seeing it not as something fixed.

Lynne immediately related the process of writing a pen-sketch to the activity of creative writing. She was aware of autobiography as a literary genre and concerned about issues of audience and misrepresentation. She also carried the fear of being evaluated and tested with her, not just into the interview but into her interactions with people as a whole:

> Lyn: ....for some reason I always seem to feel as though... be it using my mind, using my hands or whatever... I always tend to feel other people may be testing me. And I don't like to think that I don't pass the test.

Pat was equally explicit about the way that his experience of learning writing at college informed his approach to reading his interview transcript:

> Pat: .....It's probably what I've been taught see. This is it. We go to nightschool..... When I used to write down... say they said write a story about anything or anybody. I used to do it rough out of me head... scribble, scribble... but I knew what it meant. You know, the words are not... wasn't spelt right or anything. But I knew what all these scribbles were. And then I used to make sense of it later on...'Cos you've got to capture the thoughts while they're there.
>
> Int: Yes. So you're treating that in just the same way? You're treating that as... ?
>
> Pat: To me that's like a transcript that you've given me off this computer that I've said and I'm not happy with it. I think well half of this can go. The ums and ahs and... it just makes it more readable I suppose.

CONCLUSION

These were some of the ways people were making sense of the research process in our project. They come partly from the topic, partly from the research methods we used and partly from the context shared between researcher and participants.

I have argued in this paper that it is important to acknowledge that people are making sense of and making use of the research process in different ways, just as we as researchers are making sense of their lives and learning histories. These constructions will interact to shape what people tell us about themselves.

We think that the methods we are using to explore the details of individual efforts toward meaning may help us to think more clearly about how life histories are jointly constructed and about possible strategies for making explicit and developing this - inevitably - collaborative process.

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This experience echoes Sheryl Gowen's (1990) comments about how participants in a workplace literacy programme found demands to write about themselves and their everyday working practices bizarre: she suggests that people commonly "connect self with action rather than text" and therefore find tasks like the one we posed "not simply difficult"...but...." somehow alien, not a sensible thing to do."

CLEANERS TELL THEIR LIFE STORIES

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Introduction

This paper contains a preliminary analysis of some life histories given by a group of cleaners. The interviews are highlighted from a learning perspective and are special in several ways. Firstly, the informants and the interviewer know each other well through cooperating for several years in a so called research circle which can be described as a kind of study circle with the participation of one or more researchers. (For a more detailed account and analysis of the research circle, see Holmstrand 1993, Härnsten 1994.) Secondly, the interviewed women are all cleaners, that is, working in a low paid occupation, a group that is not so often visible either in daily life or in research. Thirdly, an important part of the study is the interaction between myself as a researcher and the group in the analysis of the interviews. So the study has similarities with participatory action research (PAR) and especially feminist, participatory research (Maguire 1988, Gottfried 1993).

The research circle consisted of ten women, all working at the same hospital in a small town in the middle of Sweden. When the circle began, their ages were between 30 and 55 years, and most of the women had some kind of Finish origin.

Our cooperation since several years has given the women confidence and trust towards me personally and for my intentions. They also are secure enough to demand answers about how I will make use of their stories. My main explanation is that there is very little knowledge within educational research about learning processes and learning perspectives from groups like themselves. In fact they are not represented either in the educational system or in the societal systems or organs which decide upon the organisation and the content of education. So I consider it an important democratic issue to acquire as much knowledge as possible about the learning of these women.

Interviews with the women

The only instruction I gave at the beginning of the interviews, was to draw a life line and mark important events of their life and in addition indicate everything that concerns any kind of education. The drawing of the line has been done simultaneously with our conversation. In this first phase, I have left it to my informants to decide how much they want to talk about various events and kept behind my follow-up questions. It has taken between ten minutes and more than an hour to draw the life lines. When the line was finished I went back to events where I considered it interesting to get more information. Most of the time this concerned the beginning of school, various teachers, teaching materials, the design of the premises, the importance of friends, reasons for study choices and so forth. Things like husbands, children, removals etc. have, in most cases, been spontaneously included and as a rule I have not gone into this any deeper unless it has had an apparent relevance for my core issues (studies, work, learning).

In order to give an idea of what this material can yield I will point to some interesting issues. The first one is what Harrits and Scharnberg (1988) call learning about "the grand history" through "the small history", a mechanism which in this material is apparent. The development of the public education system, its extension and changes in content are clearly observed. Through the interviews it is possible to follow the development in both Finland and Sweden during a period of rapid change. Experiences from going seven to eight and nine years in comprehensive schools to continuing schools, technical labour market educations, vocational schools and even todays secondary (gymnasium) school are represented. By and large it is of course a matter of generation what kind of primary schooling the women in my material have received but it also reflects how the labour market situation, the educational politics and societal change govern the fate of these women. Another obvious aspect is the impact of human relations - love, relationships to the children, divorces etc - upon their lives.

The second issue I would like to discuss is about choice or chance considering their job as a cleaner. Many people would naturally claim that nobody chooses to become a cleaner and that only very low-educated, with limited intellectual capacity, belong to this profession or that it is something you do for a short period of time in order to proceed later to further education. None of these notions are tenable in the material compiled. The total amount of education the seven women have gone through is quite impressive. Or what about domestic science schools, cookery education, farm school, mechanics education, clerical course and employment in areas like child care, control assistant, factory inspector, sewer, sale, waiting. Naturally these are traditional female occupations (with the exception of the mechanics education which took place in a situation when we in Sweden, to a large extent, educated unemployed people to workshop mechanics) and also jobs that usually are not so highly valued in terms of salary. On the other hand, it would probably be difficult to claim that a good knowledge is not needed to cope with such tasks. This group of women can neither be characterized as extremely low-educated since the total amount of education for most of them is around ten-eleven years.

Instead the important questions should be: what does really happen in the school and in the educations supplied? What did the women learn? What did they learn about themselves and what were their expectations and plans?

Very preliminary, since this is a point I wish to develop further together with the group (see below). It is a severe criticism against our educational system which is put forward. A very distinct observation is how the feeling of success/failure is closely tied to the teacher's attitude to the pupils and his/her interest in encouraging or blaming. Many of the women have clear pictures of increase or decline in connection with change of teachers. There are certainly glimpses of warmth, joy and appreciation of the time spent at school but it is definitely shaded by the fear for reprisals, or not being good enough, not being eminent enough. The school is perceived as something you have to go through without really seeing what it is good for. The school is a world of its own and it has really very little to do with things that are regarded as important in your life. This becomes extremely obvious when it concerns the schooling of the teenagers. Four of the women interviewed by me have described in detail the resistance they developed during the last school years and what this meant in the actual school situation.

The instrumental approach of the school becomes in a way extra visible because the group concerned does not regard the content as their own. It is a general measure of ability to have acquired a given amount of an in advance - by a certain group in society -decided knowledge, but it is really nothing that gives the persons in question an intrinsic value and a preparedness of action for the future vocational or civil life. In many cases, though, the education that has taken place after the compulsory school differs from this pattern. When the women began the cleaning work the actual knowledge that they had was far from demanding. Through the work situation a kind of "learning loss" took place and after many years in the job the women did not consider themselves capable of learning very much. And after all - why should they? What they once had learnt was of no use to them. In their present situation there was no demand for knowledge in the general sense and neither for the special vocational skills they had learnt through other training. Consequently "the school desk", as they put it, was not for them. When we, however, through the research circle work and building on the genuine experiences of the participants, brought forward aspects that would lead to a changed work situation and give the women greater influence over their own situation the attitude towards, and interest for, education changed.

Thus the knowledge demanded in our research circle was of another kind. Firstly it supplied directly applicable skills for the daily work and, secondly, it provided them with a preparedness for action and a perspective on their own situation. And there was nobody who questioned her own participation or ability to acquire the rather more thorough education that was a consequence of the circle. Accordingly it seems obvious that a self-chosen education linked to the situation is something radically different from one imposed from above.

The issue of choice or not

Naturally none of the women say that they during their schooling ever thought of becoming cleaners in their future vocational life. On the other hand it becomes apparent that when they eventually were faced with the possibility of working in a factory, as an assistant nurse or as an assistant cook they deliberately chose cleaning work. There are several motives for this choice. One motive is the normal working hours (in contrast to e.g. kitchen work, where irregular hours are necessary) and the possibilities for part-time work. Another one is the freedom they claim belong to the profession: "Nobody cares where you are and what you do as long as it becomes cleaned". Moreover a considerable professional pride is revealed. It is expressed in a joy of seeing the results of cleaning, feeling that it smells good and noting that people are feeling well in the rooms that have been cleaned and so on. At the same time the role of chance is obvious. The circle of friends is of great importance for what kind of job you get and a former cleaning manager at the hospital was acquainted with several of the women.

Cleaner as a transitional job?

The group of women I interviewed have been at the same work place and have had the same tasks for between 13 and 24 years. They had no plans for changing their profession but regarded change and improvement of their present situation as the most important task. Being a cleaner is alright and it is an essential job but under the condition that it is better organised and higher valued by others. The research circle was a step in this direction.

How do we proceed?

Now the interviews are all transcripted and the women have read their own interviews. We have met and talked individually about the content, added and reversed some misunderstandings. I also asked if there was something in the interviews they did not want to discuss in their own group. Some, but very few, issues were mentioned.

Here, where most studies end, I now go on to an additional phase. In the entire group we talk about different themes in the interviews, and make a joint analysis. The first one, chosen by the women, was about vocational training and former jobs. This proceeding fulfils two purposes.

Firstly, it brings the memory a bit further if you supply what other people have said about similar events, times or experiences of importance for the total context. Thus the "collective memory" is wider than what each individual can immediately remember. Not only the procedure of interviewing but the stories of the other women as well constitute catalysts for hidden, concealed or simply forgotten events. Accordingly in this way we can help each other to bring about more information of importance.

Secondly, the feedback starts a new process of change. Since the cleaning centre is threatened by close-down, we must continue to find strategies for future work. In doing this the results of the interviews are invaluable since they so clearly indicate the resources accessible in the group. By reading and jointly analyzing the results it becomes obvious for everyone what possibilities they carry themselves. So the process continues.

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AN EIGHTEENTH-CENTURY POET REVEALS HIMSELF AS AN EDUCATOR

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The Eastern Mediterranean can be a place of ferocious storms, and so it was in the month of October, 1749. The last week of that month had begun in tranquillity, but after the full moon on the 26th a southerly gale had arisen, increasing to hurricane force and driving low heavy clouds and electric storms before it. It also drove before it an English merchant ship, bound from Crete to Venice but forced to change course and run before the wind. Barely able to steer, with her sails blown out and her mizzen mast cut away, she drove on to the crags of Cape Sunium near Athens. Of her crew of fifty, forty seven were drowned; the three survivors included the second mate and it was later reflection on this terrible experience that led him to a career as a poet and an educator.

His name was William Falconer, and he was born in Leith in 1732. His parents were poor, and his upbringing hard, though tradition holds that he did have some schooling. At about the age of fourteen he went to sea as an apprentice in the coal trade - that huge activity of shipping north-eastern coal to London in small ships. This was perhaps the best and hardest school for seafarers ever known, and the highly professional sailors it turned out were relied on for manning the navy for 200 years.

Falconer's poetry has admiring references to the skill of these sailors in navigating treacherous North Sea passages in all weathers.

At the end of his three-year apprenticeship Falconer left the coasting trade for deep water, joining a large merchant ship trading to the Levant as second mate at the age of seventeen. To be an officer at this age was rare, and indicates his taste and aptitude for learning his profession. He was, however, unlucky in his ship, for his first voyage ended that October night on the rocks at the foot of Cape Sunium.

He would have remained one of very many sailors with such an experience behind him and completely unknown to history had it not been for the fact that about a decade after the shipwreck, and while still an officer in the merchant marine, he began writing poetry, and in 1762 published The Shipwreck, A Poem, by a Sailor. He had written several short poems before that date, unremarkable descriptive and lyric pieces which were received without comment. But the new poem - a long narrative of the disastrous voyage in three cantos - became popular and brought Falconer into fashion as a poet. Such indeed was his popularity that in 1764 he published a second and much enlarged edition of the poem, and in 1769 a third, again much revised. The last version is some 3000 lines long. His popularity continued for many years - up to the middle of the nineteenth century. For a poet now almost completely forgotten it seems remarkable that I have been able to trace some 150 separate editions of his work in England, Scotland, Ireland and America. But Falconer himself did not live to enjoy much of this popularity. He was drowned in a second shipwreck in the Indian Ocean in the early weeks of 1770. To follow the revisions of The Shipwreck is to enjoy a privileged insight into the process of a poet's self-education after, to adapt Byron's comment, he "woke up one morning and found himself famous." His poem had been published at his own expense with modest ambitions for sales, and yet it quickly made a name for its author - so much so indeed that he was taken up by the Duke of York and given a naval post which in peacetime gave him the time to write.

The first version of the poem is a relatively rough-hewn narrative, some 1300 lines in length, of the voyage from its start in calm weather in Crete to the wreck on Cape Sunium. Although autobiographical its structure is a third-person narrative, with Falconer himself clearly identified but unnamed.

The poetic form is the heroic couplet standard in the work of poets of the day. The poem is full of technical details of the ship and of ailing. It is, in effect, a versified sailor's yarn, written for, as Falconer tells us in the preface to the second edition, "the gentlemen of the sea."

But in that preface he goes on to regret that sailors had "hardly made one tenth of the purchasers." His popularity was with the general reading public of the day, and he quickly began to school himself in the ways of fashionable poetry. We see characters introduced; the captain becomes "Albert", a wise and experienced seafarer with a family awaiting his return; the other officers similarly acquire names and personalities. Falconer gives himself the name of "Arion" from the boy in the Greek myth saved from drowning by a dolphin. A sentimental love interest is introduced, with a tragic ending. But most significantly almost every line is "refined" according to the rules of orthodox contemporary poetical diction. This is of course the more difficult for Falconer in that his first version is not only couched in "plain" language, but also in a highly specific professional nautical language - that salty and arcane dialect which has been the source of so much bewilderment and irritation among non-sailors down the centuries2.

The result is a much more complex narrative, but a poem which loses tautness, simplicity and above all vitality in its two major revisions. Fortunately the details of the ship and its handling remain, since these are the central and unique features of this curious poem.

We find, therefore, as in the case of other eighteenth-century figures from what would later be called the working class who acquire reputations as poets3, pressure to conform to the orthodoxies of the day erode the individuality of the writer. Luckily in Falconer's case this is confined to the sentimental additions and to the details of style. The essential qualities of the work remain and indeed are enhanced. It is to these I shall now turn.

From the start the poem was intended to be educational, and a close analysis of it in its various forms reveals a surprisingly complex and diverse pedagogical structure.

The middle years of the eighteenth century were extremely favourable for the didactic poet. Readers appreciated the Ovidian rule that the poet should instruct by pleasing, and such poems flourished, ranging from moral precept to practical instruction.

All three versions of The Shipwreck reveal the author as having a strong innate desire to learn from experience and reading, to evaluate his learning, and then to teach others. By dramatising Falconer's own experiences the poem draws attention to the deprivation of a sea life, and to the deep conservatism and distrust of innovation of the profession:

> "To long-tried practice obstinately warm."

Falconer uses his poem quite explicitly to teach young sailors a scientific rather than superstitious approach to their trade. Great attention is paid to details of seamanship, based on scientific principles.

> "The watchful seaman, whose sagacious eye
> On sure experience may with truth rely,
> Who, from the reigning cause, foretels th'effect..."

If this is in effect professional training, then a second objective of the poem is, by contrast, liberal education in its pure form. I have indicated that the poem reveals a man deeply conscious of the depriving effects of a sea life, especially on a young and receptive spirit. He depicts his own youthful self thus:

"Forlorn of heart, and with severe decree,
Condemn'd reluctant to the faithless sea,
With long farewel he left the laurel grove,
Where science and her tuneful sisters rove.-
Hither he wander'd, anxious to explore,
Antiquities of nations now no more;
To penetrate each distant realm unknown,
And range excursive o'er th'untravel'd zone.
In vain! - for rude Adversity's command,
Still on the margin of each famous land,
With unrelenting ire his steps oppos'd...

In the third canto of the poem there is a long digression on the sites of antiquity past which the ship is sailing before the gale. Dramatically it is well-placed as a relief from the frenzy of the storm, but its real purpose is quite clear. It is intended as a course of instruction on the classics for the sailors he had intended as his readers. "Sad Ocean's genius'' has deprived them of the chance to learn, and make the most of their travels to distant places. Again we find Falconer obeying his impulse to teach others his own hard-gained learning. In a sense he is claiming that the sailor has the opportunity of a working man's version of the grand tour4, if only he can find a way to take the opportunity.

The third educational objective I have identified in this poem is one that is introduced in its later versions. On finding that his readers were for the most part the reading public, Falconer adapts the poem so that it becomes in effect the epic of the English merchant service. The ship is given the highly significant name of Britannia. The heroism of the crew is compared to that of epic characters of Homer and Virgil. And most telling of all is a section introduced in the second version which is expressly addressed to the non-seafaring reader. He hopes his poem will draw compassion's tear

For kindred miseries, oft beheld too near:

For kindred-wretches, oft in ruin cast

On Albion's strand, beneath the wintry blast:

For all the pangs, the complicated woe,

Her bravest sons, her faithful sailors know!

So pity, gushing o'er each British breast,

Might sympathise with Britain's sons distrest.

This is a very early example of education for public awareness, in this case of the sacrifice and the hitherto unsung heroism of the ordinary men of the merchant service, rather than the Royal Navy.

Finally I wish briefly to consider Falconer's other, and in fact more enduring, contribution to education. I have mentioned that The Shipwreck is full of technical nautical details, with the intention of teaching good practice to young sailors. In the preface he explains that the large number of footnotes are the result of the inadequacy of the available nautical dictionaries, which he cannot recommend to students of the sea. Again we see his strong instinct for and commitment to teaching based on practice informed by up to date theory. In the succeeding versions the notes are revised and much extended, partly to explain terms and practices to the wider audience. It is fascinating to observe the sailor and the poet caught between his two respective dialects - nautical terminology and mid-eighteenth century poetical diction - striving towards the transparency of language he believes appropriate for the teacher.

This process of explication matures eventually with the publication in 1769 of An Universal Dictionary of the Marine. A very substantial work, it reflects the confidence characteristic of the eighteenth-century dictionary maker, together with that delightful licence for personalia which also characterise such lexicographers as Dr Johnson5. In article after article one can see Falconer enjoying the freedom of a language unconstrained by the poetry out of which the Dictionary grew. An eloquent example, given the author's personal experience is the definition of "Wreck", which he glosses simply as Wreck, the ruins of a ship which has been stranded or dashed to pieces on a shelf, rock, or lee-shore by tempestuous weather.

Nowhere in this does he allude to the personal history which informs some of his other definitions. It is as though shipwreck was outside his experience.

The Dictionary rapidly became the standard work, and a central learning resource for apprentices and naval cadets and midshipmen until the end of the era of sail. But while it was attracting the approval of reviewers and buyers in 1770, the frigate Aurora, somewhere in the Indian Ocean, was lost with all hands. Among her complement was Falconer. No trace of her was ever found.

Notes

1. The most famous product of this "school" was James Cook, who had served his apprenticeship in this trade only a few years earlier, and whose Endeavour in which he sailed to Australia was modelled on a North Sea collier.

2. The introduction of terms of art into elegant poetical diction was a subject of some contention at the time. An often-cited instance is that of James Grainger, author of a long poem on sugar plantations The Sugar Cane, in which he was forced by derision to change "rats" to "whisker'd vermin race."

3. Many such can be found. See C B Tinker, Nature's Simple Plan (Oxford 1922). A good example is the fate of Stephen Duck, the "thresher poet" (1705-1756) A farm labourer from Wiltshire, Duck was taken up by well-meaning patrons and published Poems on Several Occasions in 1737. It contains "The Thresher's Labour" a marvellous account of the year's work on a farm. But he was later induced to write poems in the fashion and his later work is confined to very unremarkable odes on state occasions and watery love lyrics.

4. At this time the "Grand Tour" was very much Roman rather than Greek, owing to Greece being closed to tourists by the dominant Ottoman rulers. Falconer's praise for the Greek antiquities and anger at the Turks made him a very early advocate of Greek independence and attracted the warm praise of Byron.

5. For example "Retreat: the order...in which a fleet of French men of war decline engagement, or fly from a pursuing enemy."

NARRATIVES AND IDENTITY IN HIGHER EDUCATION

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This paper will consider the role of personal narrative in changing identity, as expressed through the experience of learning within higher education. It is intended to illustrate the process through which adult students redefine themselves as they negotiate this period of transition in their lives. I will suggest that the development of self-narratives, concerning both the present and the past, is closely related to sites of contestation within which old identities are discarded and new identities are created. There is a constant interplay between the past and the present expressed through narrative structures. As new self-narratives are developed they become vehicles for negotiating sites of contestation between existing domains of knowledge and new ways of knowing within unfamiliar institutional settings. Narratives are crucial within this process. They do not merely describe past events; neither is it the case that they merely redefine the past in the light of the present. More fundamentally they construct the student's present identity within higher education. Considered in a wider framework these self-narratives are both contingent on and constitutive of the social structures that they describe. Rather than merely reporting a social reality, they become part of a dialectical process in which the construction of the narratives themselves both create and are mirrored by the structures and relationships that they describe.

An interdisciplinary approach is helpful in understanding the complexities of personal narrative. The work of authors within may different disciplines: sociology, psychology, education, linguistics, reflects a growing understanding of the centrality of narrative structures within personal identity. Rosen (1993), suggests that the emotional and meaning making power in all discourse actually derives from personal narrative. Bruner (1990) focuses on the importance of narrative modes of thinking, specifically in relation to meaning making. Giddens (1991) draws on the work of Charles Taylor and highlights the ways in which a person's identity is found in the narratives which surround it. Kerby (1992) outlines the importance of language as constitutive of the self and sees narratives as a primary embodiment of our understanding of the world and ultimately ourselves. Tannen (1989), considers features of discourses: repetition, dialogue and imagery, which are not confined to literary genres but are at the very heart of everyday conversation. She suggests that although narrative is itself a conversational strategy which creates involvement between speakers, what differentiates story telling from other discourse genres is that it makes use of a vast array of different conversational strategies within which repetition. dialogue and imagery are central. Her focus on these three strategies, can be a useful starting point for looking at personal narratives and their relationship to the construction of present identity.

Adults frequently enter higher education at a time of change and transition in their lives. Embarking upon this new route involves the constant negotiation of multiple identities as they balance their studies with the demands of home, family and work. The research from which this paper is drawn has attempted to understand the complexities of decision making for adult Access course students in relation to individual life histories. Throughout a period of eighteen months students have been interviewed six times as they completed their access course and moved on into degree level courses. During the interviews the participants had the opportunity to reflect upon their experiences of entering higher education in relation to their own life history. Central to the stories that people have told about themselves are issues of personal identity, linking the past and the present and descriptive of multiple identities both now and at previous points in their lives.

There are different ways of interpreting and understanding the stories that people tell about their reasons for, and experiences of, moving into higher education. Biographical narratives are often understood primarily with reference to past events and the way in which they enable the story teller to reconsider and, in some senses, re-write the stories and events of the past. Consequently, on one level these stories can be understood as facilitating the description and understanding of a past identity in the light of present decisions to move into higher education. However, a further level of interpretation, gained from looking more closely at specific texts, allows us to see how the choice and description of which stories to tell is closely linked to the definition of present identity. At the same time the story itself -the self-narrative- enables more than a consideration of an old self. Building on this perspective, these narratives can be understood as vehicles to construct present identities, rather than merely reinterpreting old ones.

Within the interviews there is frequently a repetition of stories told around key events or incidents. These are indicative of the themes which students consider as central to their own autobiographies. As they decide to pursue or to continue with their studies, students are considering such fundamental questions as: how did I get here; what am I doing here; what is my future likely to be; why didn't I do this before? To arrive at the answers to these questions it is necessary to pick out and elaborate upon images of the past which have a centrality to present identities. Tannen (1989), in her work on conversational discourse, suggests that repetition is the central process through which a particular discourse is constructed within conversation. She is concerned with specific features of repetition within small chunks of conversation and the ways in which these create involvement between speakers. However, it is also possible to identify the importance of repetition in the construction of discourses in larger pieces of text -the interview texts of these adult students. In these texts the repetition of narrative themes, can be interpreted in relation to personal identities. Although repetition within the narrative may appear on the surface as no more than the retelling of a familiar event, within the text we can identify how the telling of such a story is related to the emergence of a new self identity crucial to the student at this time.[1] When embarking upon a narrative which is specifically concerned with their own identity, students often begin by setting the scene with a description and imagery of the circumstances within which the incident took place. They then continue by situating themselves within it and reporting the dialogue that took place between themselves and others. Retelling the same incident or revisiting the same theme in subsequent interviews may result in a slightly different story being told with different themes being foregrounded; this variation in thematic choice and representation seems to be closely related to issues of identity that are central to the student at the present time.

Jean chose to outline a conversation with a significant person in her life and the disquiet that she had felt about embarking on a course which might entail taking exams and writing essays. Later in the interviews she returned to the anxiety that she felt about essay writing in a different context, but with the additional information that she had been successful

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Interestingly, it is this very process of repetition which is often identified as a problematic within in-depth qualitative research interviews, since it raises questions about the validity and authenticity of the text. In essence this retelling and reworking of old material -through narrative structures- enables a deeper level understanding of the complexities of particular themes and seems to be central to the process through which new identities are constructed.

in producing her first essay she now felt a little more confident about her identity as a student. She also told a short anecdote concerning her feelings as she waited for the bus to go to the university at the beginning of her course and how she felt uncomfortable and unsure about her role as a mature student. Her identity -as with others- was integrally related to her feelings about herself within the institution and what was and would be required of her during her course. Students may talk at length about commitments outside the course and this frequently results in the reworking of new themes within familiar stories to illustrate how they have moved on from past situations. Michael, a thirty year old, had found that entering higher education had enabled him to break away from a dominant father and his involvement in his family business. His self narrative was graphically illustrated by incidents of confrontation with his father when he was struggling to take the Access course and at the same time continue working. He told stories of a brother and his inability to break free from family ties in contrast to his own success. Central to the stories that he told was the forging of a new self identity in which he could use his studying as an opportunity to move on. His later interviews contained narratives that centred on some of the difficulties that had arisen for him as a student, yet he still returned to some of the themes and incidents with his father from the past. These were illustrative of a feature which dominated all the students stories: the constant interplay between their identity as a student and their other present identities of, for example, mother, father, partner, work colleague. Story telling seems to be a way to resolve these often conflicting identities.

Additionally, the narratives outlined relationships between aspects of the course being studied and issues of self identity. Central to the construction of new identities seemed to be the process through which students used the course to make meaning through new ways of knowing. Students found that the acquisition of new forms of knowledge introduced them to other ways of interpreting and understanding their own worlds. Previous ways of knowing could appear incomplete or limiting within other contexts as students began to consider familiar issues from new perspectives. As a result, when new ways of knowing created conflict with the old then there were points at which the spoken texts themselves become sites of contestation for the emergence of new identities. This was particularly apparent where students described a sense of competition between the academic demands of their course and ways of understanding knowledge in their wider lives. Negotiating the implicit codes and conventions of higher education proved both complex and taxing for these mature students. Trying to understand what is required within a particular course and how that may conflict with the requirements of other courses is a constant problem for many mature students. At such times present identities within higher education may seem rather fragile and can easily be threatened by a passing remark from lecturer or tutor. The narratives that were told around such events focused on the difficulties that these students were experiencing as they begun to understand what was required of them. At the same time, they illustrated some of the frustrations that they were experiencing, as a result of the belief that past identities were in some ways invalid within these new institutional settings. These self-narratives are useful in an understanding of the relationship between, institutional practices, social contexts and personal identities. Through narrative structures, students highlight the conflicts that exist for them between the institutional practices of the university and personal identities.

Using case study material from interviews conducted with mature students, the workshop will give participants the opportunity to look closely at some texts which illustrate the relationship between, self-narratives, identities and experiences within higher education.

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SECRET WORLDS OF THE WAY WE TALK

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Explorations into linguistic histories with children and adults have shown me a frailty of awareness of language and of its embodiment in secret histories. Yet when memories are unlocked, intensities of feelings and burgeoning narratives flow forth. Things surface. Repressed memories become accessible. Perceptions of self and of society arise in terms which have potentials for empowering the person. Images and complexities of meanings that embody contemporary cultural circumstances can also emerge in terms that connect with intimacy and society.

"If I am not speaking my own language, who am I?" Maddawa Yamopingo (1994) voices a profound truth that contains a personal and political understanding of the symbiotic relationship between language and identity. Speaking our own language I believe, refers also to the particular dialect and way of speaking we recognise as 'our own' and which separates us from other speakers of the same language. However most of us at sometime in our lives have changed the way we speak. By the time children arrive at adolescence many have become fluent in accent and dialect shifts. These experiences embodied in our speech affect us powerfully and yet are often unremembered in later years.

It is evident that people hold intense views and opinions about language. Controversy and conflict exist between facts and popular opinion. Accents and dialects can produce strong feelings, and expectations about a person are closely associated with the way they speak. The problem lies, not with variation in language but in the attitudes held about language.

Autobiography provides a way of reflecting on the past. How have earlier experiences shaped our lives? In linguistic autobiographical work attention is focused on one's personal linguistic history and the forces and contexts that have patterned the way we speak.

Here follows a brief and personal outline drawing on socio- and psycholinguistics that lead me to use linguistic autobiography as an educational process and way of exploring experience and the relationships between language, personal history and identity.

The position adopted here draws on the social constructivist theories that underpin Halliday's social-semiotic view of language (1978), Vygotsky's theory of the genetic roots of thought and language (1962) and Trudgill's research on dialect and accent (1975). Standard English is only one of the dialects of the English tongue yet it is often viewed as the form from which all others deviate. Other dialects are frequently considered 'wrong' or 'incorrect'. There is a close relationship in Britain between dialect and accent and social and regional background (Trudgill 1975). Thus dialect and accent are closely associated with the class system. As standard English is the form used in government, education and among the 'ruling-classes' it has a powerful influence on standard and nonstandard speakers. Not only is the way we speak measured against standard English and its grammatical rules but speech indicates one's place in the hierarchy of the social class system.

Until quite recently standard English was the only form of language acceptable in the education and in schools. It was the dialect systematically taught as though it was a well-defined, self-contained unit rather than belonging to a continuum of dialects that merge into one another. Children were corrected when they used different grammatical constructions and were often treated as being careless, slovenly or lazy in their speech when using dialect forms.

These attitudes and views about language are widespread in society and have a long history in the teaching of language in the state school system. Over time they have had the effect of empowering some children and disempowering others, who for various geographic and social reasons fail to use Standard English. Many other wise bright and intelligent children, as a result, developed negative views about themselves and their ability to do well at school. In order to succeed they had to adopt Standard English and risked being alienated from family and peer groups. Speaking Standard English was seen as the correct way to speak and through which it was possible to 'rise-up' in the class system. It was closely associated with 'being educated' and thus being more 'genteel' and of 'good character' (Fowler 1982). Many rejected education entirely. Whether consciously or unconsciously they felt the language change required threatened their own identify and values. Their way of resisting was to reject education itself. Maintaining their own dialect was, and is, an active statement about themselves and the system.

Imposing Standard English is a powerful way of demonstrating the social hierarchy and an authority system. When subjected to the demands of transforming their own language, non-standard speakers are placed in a position of inferiority in relationship to the dominant group and therefore experience their own dialect, consciously and unconsciously as inadequate and inferior. Thus not only is their language considered deficient, but by implication so are they as people.

Language has always been a repository and carrier of power in that dominant groups have used it for their own ends. I refer you to the researchers of Rossi-Landi (1981) for substantiation here. It is in the interests of the State to cover over the variety of dialects by the insistence of a national language and to treat language and culture as unproblematic. State Education reflects the dominant ideology and power relations of social class. This is clearly evident in the way about which language has been written in official Reports on Language from the 1870s. From establishment of State Education to the most recent Draft Proposals for the National Curriculum Standard English has provided the exclusive criterion. In 1921 the Newbolt Report viewed the main purpose of English teaching to be "the first and chief duty of the Elementary School ... to give its pupils speech, and make them articulate and civilised ..." Sampson, a member of the Newbolt Committee in English For the English (1921) described the first two priorities of the English course to be firstly "systematic training in Standard English" and secondly "systematic training in the use of correct spoken English". We see here that Standard English was not even considered a dialect but is confirmed as the only medium through which school knowledge was presented, the dialect to be learned by all pupils irrespective of their regionality. This continued until well into the 1970s. The Bullock Report, A Language For Life (1975) gives the first indication and official recognition that English has a variety of dialects whose grammar and syntax are as equally regular as Standard English and should be of equal status. I argue that conservative cultural beliefs influence attitudes to dialect. Consequently, change in perceptions of and attitudes to dialect are slow in transformation. It was not by chance that the publication of the LINC materials was suppressed in the late 1980s, nor that the new Draft Proposals, summer 1994, for the National Curriculum in English omit to include any attention to Language diversity. It fails to include the history of languages and makes no comment about issues such as 'power relationships in language and society'.

Education has failed many of our pupils. Prevailing attitudes about language embody prejudiced opinions. Many practices ignore language diversity. Attitudes that effectively disempower children by treating their language as inappropriate, inadequate and deficient nurture poor self-images, low self-esteem and lead to disenfranchisement. Until attitudes and approaches change other attempts to provide equal access and opportunities will also fail most of our children.

Consider how the individual experiences these pressures and processes. Strong views and feelings are aroused by the way people speak by attitudes to dialects. They are deeply embedded in human consciousness and political systems. We need to examine the social and psychological processes involved in learning language and the ways in which language and cultural identity are enmeshed. Halliday (1978) in his conception of language as a social semiotic argues that culture is an edifice of meanings. Language as one of the semiotic systems that constitute culture, is powerful because it is an encoding system for many other systems. The interpersonal exchange of meanings in language takes place within specific contexts and situations that embody particular social values. The content of our speaking has a semiotic construct enabling us to predict and understand each other. Through this dynamic interplay of speech roles, people act out the social structures communicating the shared systems of values and knowledge and affirming their own roles and status. Variation in the linguistic system is functional in expressing variation in status and roles. Culture is differentially accessible to different social groups. Thus Halliday arrives at the view that language actively symbolises the social system. As children learn their mother tongue they also learn a range of social practices and meanings. The way they come to see the world and know their place in it, is mediated by significant others mainly through language. The process of construing reality is inseparable from the meaning systems encoded in language. As language is learned through use in specific contexts, it becomes the key instrument in socialisation. Language embodies particular images of the world and of particular social structures. In this way patterns of social hierarchy and knowledge are construed from dialect variation. Consequently in learning a language the young child simultaneously learns both a language and a particular view about culture.

Lying behind these important constructs one finds Vygotsky's thesis (1962) concerning the relationship between thought, language and identity. It has contributed richly to our understanding of cognitive and linguistic processes. He argues that in the process of learning language the young child uses speech in a functional manner as an aid to exploratory activities. Verbalising assists the organisation of meaning. We are familiar with verbal monologues young children use in play. Gradually the need to vocalise speech diminishes. That is, speech does not cease but becomes silent. It becomes "speech in the head" or "inner speech". In the process speech becomes abbreviated and highly saturated with meanings. Inner language is on the one hand a personal and private reality and yet it is also socially embedded with highly specific cultural meanings and values.

Dialect and accent carry many of these complex cultural meanings and are at the same time intimately linked to family relationships and personal identity. Do you remember when you first consciously changed your accent or were embarrassed by the way in which a relative spoke? Self-concepts, values and beliefs are formed within the network of social relationships. Language is inseparable from the intimacy of its usage. It is not surprising therefore that we have strong feelings about language in all its variations.

Propositions to which I have referred support the view that language is the principal way the world is represented to us and through which we represent world to ourselves. The argument also maintains that ideology is a structured and inevitable feature of society and is primarily transmitted through language. Furthermore, ideologies operate as a form of domination. Differences in language illustrate and represent class divisions. There are influential views that prefer these matters to remain unquestioned. But I believe these are important issues to understand and confront. There are ways of raising awareness and critical consciousness that make it possible to achieve an understanding of oneself in relations to social structures, and in so doing come to gain greater insight into the human condition and into culture. Such consciousness is essentially creative. Here is our rationale for linguistic autobiography.

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'THE SWIFT COURSE OF MY LIFE': THE CV AND COMMUNITY LIFE STORY WRITING

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The community publishing movement in this country which has grown and flourished over the last twenty years has celebrated the value of the first-person accounts of experience by that majority of the population who, in the dominant media of journalism, academic research, and commercially-published autobiography, had hitherto been only described at secondhand: working-class people of all ages, ethnic minority groups, women, people with disabilities, and those whose confidence in and access to their potential in reading and writing has been limited.

In this paper I want to focus on a form of life story writing which forms the context for this movement and which plays a key role in the construction of identity in our culture: namely, the *curriculum vitae* (usually known as the CV). As a public life story in competition with others, the CV is a highly selective and even quasi-fictitious version of a life story, written in order to win passports to other life chances. It is premised on a series of assumptions about life as individual achievement, progress and success; and it is as a challenge to these assumptions -and to the dominant ideology of which they are part - that, as I see it, oral and written autobiographical work in adult education finds a key purpose.

For the purposes of my argument, and for the sake of clarity, I will refer to this work as 'community life story writing'; and as this has to be a brief paper, I will only sketch the outlines of the relationship between this and CV writing: at the Life histories and learning conference, I look forward to the opportunity to develop the issues with colleagues.

Writing the story of your life is about making a personal narrative out of past memories and present reflection. Any life, of course, has many stories to be made from it; and 'the' story is always a selection. Each time any one of us sets out to write something about our lives, we are picking out and touching up for others' scrutiny a selection of episodes, dressed up with remembered hopes or fears and presented in the framework of the picture we have of ourselves now. As authors, our choices of which portraits of ourselves we create depend on our idea (conscious or unconcious) of the reader we imagine will be looking at them. On this idea - of the role, attitude and interests of the person who will read our writing - may depend our choice, for example, of our own roles, attitudes and interests. Do we wish to depict ourselves as suffering victim or defiant rebel? collaborator or freelance agent? If we see the reader as a sympathetic equal with an interest in the nuances of relationships, we may choose to write about those, with delicacy, feeling and humour; if, on the other hand, we believe (or imagine) the reader to be judging or assessing us in some way, we are more likely to restrain and disguise these reflections and, in so doing, create a different picture of ourselves.

This relationship, between the writer and her imagined reader, is central to the question of selection and truth in life story writing: a question which preoccupies both historians and employers. The *curriculum vitae* is a document purporting to tell the truth about the applicant's history, after all; and (to some extent) the job interview aims to discovering whether it does so. ("She says she has 'good communication skills': let's find out if she has"). In social science research, the issue has been of interest for some time. Martin Kohli, for instance, described over ten years ago the ambivalence of autobiographical narratives; that is, that they are on the one hand *reconstructive* (that is, tied to present contingencies and constraints) and on the other, likely to contain 'at least *some* truth'. His suggestion for a criterion to assess their truthfulness I find useful: it is, he says, an *aesthetic* one, and the question we need to ask in order to establish our assessment of an autobiography is whether it is 'an aesthetic 'success.'(Kohli 1981, 69-70).

This is a view which, interestingly, preoccupies not only people writing and researching community life story writing but also those who advise on and promote the idea of 'professional CVs'. These are three examples of how the latter express this preoccupation:

> Whether you are one of the three million unemployed or one of the many after a job change for the better, here is an offer you really can't refuse. **Jobs and careers** is offering you 10 copies of our professionally prepared CV, printed on top quality white Conqueror paper and presented in a durable green folder for just £11p&p - that's half the usual price....A relatively low-cost investment in your future, one which could pay-off (sic) handsomely - in the job you want!(1)
>
> Professional cvs.
> An employer's first impression of you is your CV. For a professionally designed and written CV that stands up and stands out, call AHEAD CV on...(2)
>
> CVs. First impressions do count. We guarantee a professional, well presented CV. Laser printed. Call... (3)

To judge from these and many other small ads appearing in local and national press each week, there is in an industry of scribes out there, waiting to package 'the swift course of your life' (*curriculum vitae*, literally translated) into an impressive - and aesthetically pleasing - product. They are 'professional' CV designers and writers, skilled at producing the 'professional-looking', or even 'perfect'(4) CV. The aesthetics may be less the literary ones to which Martin Kohli refers, but rather those of graphic (and typographic) design. Appearance is all: for the reader of these texts is in a hurry. Their need is to gain an instant impression on which to base an instant decision - the first one in a series of the decisions entailed in the process of job description, advertisement, selection, and appointment.

The imbalance between the labour time of the writer and that of the reader is, of course, not exclusive to CVs. Maya Angelou (whose own autobiography runs to four volumes) was recently quoted as making a comment on this. In a profile related to her most recent book, this incident, which at first sight reads as a put-down by a star condescending to one of her fans, is a sharp reminder of the paradox felt by many writers faced in relation to their readers:

> Maya's response to the woman who accosted her in a hotel lobby to whisper, "I love your book, I read it in one afternoon", was: "Thanks, it took me a year to write."'(5)

Perhaps the effort of the writer is always out of proportion to that of the reader: but acutely so, in the case of CVs. From my own experience, as a reader of both CV's and life stories written by other people, I have often reflected on the difference between these two kinds of writing for the reader, as well as for the writer. Over a period of ten years I was responsible for the selection and appointment of at least five jobs a year (for each of which an average of fifteen applications had to be read). During the same time, as an adult literacy educator, community publisher, and researcher, I have read and re-read a large number of autobiographies of varying lengths. The two reading activities were conducted at entirely different speeds. Certainly, the inequality between myself as reader and the writer of these community life stories is not an equal one. As I have written elsewhere, there is a difference - both in the literacy classroom and the community history/oral history room - between the 'truth' invited from the student (or interviewee) and that which the teacher (or interviewer) holds back about ourself:

> 'We keep our secrets: our own political or moral positions and personal lives are only drawn into the work under certain conditions, or are left to be glimpsed through our 'professional' texts.' (Mace, 1992: 26)

Nevertheless, the labour-time relationship between the author and reader, is far more equal in the making of community life stories than in that of *curriculum vitae.* (6) There is no doubt that reading in a few minutes or an hour the product of writing laboured over many hours, weeks or months is a cruel business - for the reader, but even more so for the writer. While writers of community life stories are rarely read in such an acutely competitive context, writers of *curriculum vitae* always are.

Of course, many jobs expect something more than a CV and covering letter. After all, there is another document to which the applicant has to relate theirs: namely the description of the job, and the portrait (or 'specification') of the person thought desirable to carry it out. The applicant has to persuade the reader that there is a relationship between the two. In a personal account of writing job applications, Fiona Ormerod makes two interesting points which are important here. First, unlike any other writing, she felt 'totally in the dark' as to the reader she was writing for - a situation compounded by the fact that the only response was either no response at all (leaving her to guess what she had failed to do) or, rarely an invitation to meet for an interview and elaborate orally on what she had written. Second, much is at stake in this kind of writing. The writer of life experience is putting herself forward in the best light she can; leaving out, for example, detail of any shadows (such as medical conditions, hesitations and weaknesses. (Ormerod, 1994). These comments, as I say, refer to the writing which 'supports' the CV itself, often known as 'the supporting statement'. Often, job details give no indication as to the maximum length expected of this ('use separate page if required'), leaving the writer to guess what kind of length would be met with most approval.

Meanwhile, the individual engaged in putting together the scoreboard of her life which forms the CV is writing to a formula, not unlike the position of a Mills and Boon author on the production line of romance fiction. The 'professional' CV writers and experts are offering an induction into the particular formula necessary for producing this kind of writing: which itself, as I have been suggesting, is a kind of fiction - a selective reconstruction of a life history. There it all is: dated and located - birth (the first of our life achievements), schooling, and jobs: ornamented with exam results and job titles (if any) and the names and addresses of two other people who can vouch that we are what we claim (implicitly) to be: reliable, honest, and most of all, successful.

CV conventions dictate that we should leave out, in neat symmetry, precisely those things of which both community life story writing encourages the inclusion: the whole span of childhood; dreams; disappointments; and failures. The life portrayed is that of achievement, progress, and successes, listed in episodes ordered by the chronology of the calendar, not the heart. The one thing that makes any common link between the aesthetics of the *curriculum vitae* and that of the community life story is that convention in application forms for jobs which requires (sometimes, but not always) that this chronology should be presented in reverse sequence, starting with the present and working back. For the story of a life is about the story of the present, as well as the past: and the writer, both of CVs and of community life stories, is a living actor in that story, beginning from today.

Notes

The inspiration for the paper came from something I witnessed earlier this year, in which the same person, at the same event, gave two very different representations of her life story: on the one hand, via a written c.v., and on the other, by a public speech to a conference. I am grateful to Monica Lucero whose speech, at the World University Service conference on **Education, Integration and Democracy** in London, March 1994, held a hallful of people spellbound. Later, on a table of papers from individuals (including myself) putting themselves forward for nomination to WUS's executive committee, I read her CV. The contrast between the dry summary of education, qualifications, and work experience and the autobiographical account she gave us that morning of her experience of imprisonment in Argentina and exile, with her son, to this country, stayed with me for a long time afterwards.

(1) Jobs and Careers, Reed Regional Newspapers (Midland): Friday 1 April 1994

(2) The Big Issue weekly: March 29- 4 April 1994

(3) Times Educational Supplement, 10 June 1994

(4) 'The Perfect CV: contains over 50 examples of excellent CVs to help you prepare a CV that reflects your skills and potential' is a title advertised in BCA Book Clubs Bestsellers catalogue, Spring 1994

(5) Margaret Ormerod, 'Coming on strong', **Guardian Weekend**, 14 May 1994: 10

(6) In my experience, a vivid exception to this occurred this year, when, as one of a seven-member panel of 'first-round judges' for the National Life Story Award Scheme, I faced the prospect of a hundred life stories to read and select for shortlisting in just over a month.

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HEARING VOICES, CHANGING LIVES: GIRLS TALK ABOUT EDUCATION

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This paper will explore initial findings from Educational Life Histories written by young women (17-18 years) taking A-levels. Invited to address the question 'How did I get to here?' (i.e. involved in post-compulsory education) the girls made sense of both past and present through texts that illuminated their subjectivities and past experience. These written lives are not 'remembered in tranquillity'; on the contrary, adolescents are in process of manipulating a variety of perspectives, experiencing both conflict and change. As one girl said, "Not only are the people around me constantly changing in their views on life but I am too". Texts written at this time of flux give insights into the relationship between personal history, evolving identity, and use of language. I shall describe some of the ways in which these elements interrelate, and then elaborate by drawing on narratives that show how three young women, in different circumstances, represent their educational history.

Identity, life history and language

These personal histories show that girls often find that their sense of personal power and efficacy varies depending on context, and that the kind of identity that seems possible in one situation is challenged or contradicted in another. The narratives show how girls negotiate complex interactions between a triangle of school, home, and friends, all set within broader patterns of power relations, such as class, race, and gender. In addition the struggle to find a 'voice', a unique expression of self, is shown to be frequently affected by a psychological undertow: the girl's own doubts and insecurities, and the relational dynamics she is involved in at home and school. That girls are more than capable of describing such complicated life histories has been shown in recent studies that have concentrated on 'listening to girls as authorities about girls' experience'1. The narratives that I am dealing with show that girls have developed the skills of 'reading' their emotional and social surroundings although they may present their experiences within different frames of reference. Bruner argues that the family continues to influence 'life accounting'. For young people I should also include the peer group, and expand Bruner's argument to suggest that it is 'by posing the thematic structures in terms of which life can be accounted for, by setting the linguistic contrasts and defining the dilemmas', that both may constrain 'the management of self-consciousness and agency.'2

I shall elaborate these themes with reference to three girls who have represented their experience of education in terms of constriction of agency. It will be seen that a girl might hold this view even when one or other parent is making strenuous efforts to address the power relations of class, race and gender. Her perspective on what restricts her agency may be conceptualised within the framework of her peer group, or it might draw on psychological discourse to represent the 'I' as it responds emotionally to peers or parents.

Catherine
Catherine is a middle-class, only, child, whose narrative suggests a strong identification with her professional parents, linked with a longing to gain acceptance from her peers. Catherine knows that in her parents' frame of reference, university and a 'good' job, are both "naturally assumed" and "essential", and in contrast "messing about" even at primary school, was felt to be so unacceptable, that she felt "terrified" at the prospect of being "found out" doing this. When speaking of her parents Catherine uses words within a semantic field centred on being judged and failing. At school she feels, "very insecure". Faced with being left out of a group it, "seemed very important to me....that I should do everything in my power to fit in" But Catherine is in a quandary. Her friends are, " 'naturally' intelligent. They seemed to go out a lot and never revised much". Now she is in a new linguistic frame where being, "a total square, or 'boffin'", is the negative label given to the only approach to school work that her parents would approve of. Deciding to woo the group she gets mediocre marks in her exams but left "feeling awful" by the emotional aftermath at home she decides to make a clean "break" with her friends so, "I would never let myself or my parents down again." However Catherine still conceptualises her future in psychological terms that relate to her relationship with her peers. She is afraid that at University "people won't want to know me" and intends to study psychotherapy as "people will need me then" and there is just one occasion when her grave, anxious narrative changes tone, and she seems to speak with the syntax of her peers, projecting university as a "chance to find out who the hell I am".

Sarah
Sarah's narrative suggests that she has internalised contradictory parental positions towards school work that constrain her agency in complicated ways. On one hand there is potential for issues of gender to restrict her. On the other hand there is the possibility that a struggle between a parent's sense of what a girl 'should be', and the daughter's own sense of what she might be, may lead to internalised ambivalence as the girl anticipates loss - either of her own voice, or of her parent's abandonment - whatever course she takes. Sarah, the child of a working class father, presents her mother as a strong encouraging presence, "inspiring" her to "keep top of the class", and to take-up post-compulsory education, "because she gave up A-levels to marry my dad and although she doesn't regret marrying dad she really wishes she had waited and done her A-levels and so she really persuaded me not to throw away any opportunities I get." Sarah then adds, rather doubtfully, "I suppose I've always remembered that" and goes on to reflect, "So far I've made it sound like everything has been really easy", before describing her difficulties.

Sarah presents her recent relationships with another girl, and a serious boyfriend, together with a serious eating disorder, as "distractions" from "what I have to do". Her language moves backwards and forwards between the perspective of home and peer group. She contrasts herself who has "always loved school" with her boyfriend, who, in a colloquial phrase that captures adolescent contempt, "didn't think much to education". Using this syntax suggests a reluctant respect, as does the phrase "on the wild side" describing her girlfriend, which conjures up an untamed, non-circumscribed lifestyle, more admired than despised. Apart from the "distractions" at school Sarah has an extra complication. It was the attitude of her father, who, she suggests, made her feel that, "there wasn't any point" in her continuing with her A-levels, as, "he didn't seem bothered" about her success, and offered no support for her academic work.

It can only be conjecture but it seems that in their different ways each parent may be asking Sarah to be passive and compliant; accepting both her mother's wish that she should succeed where the mother did not, and the father's wish that she, like her mother, returns to a traditional female position by giving up her schoolwork. There is considerable evidence that such confused messages may contribute to anorexia; the strategy of 'privileged girls struggling with the demands for competitive achievement and the conventions of femininity' 3. Like Catherine, Sarah 'catches up' from 'falling behind.' But Sarah's autonomous acts of experimentation with the life styles of her friends may not have been the "disaster" she names it, but a necessary exploration of alternatives before getting on top of her weight problem, returning to her studies "a lot stronger", and getting "the results I wanted".

Vicky

Vicky, is a working class girl, with a Nigerian father and an English mother. She speaks in the language of home when she says "we, as a family, keep ourselves to ourselves", as it is the family's experience, and her own as "the only half-cast person in the whole school......that racism has lessened but it will never completely go away." Vicky's father has asserted that "without education you're nowhere" and he "geared/ pushed" Vicky and her sisters into A-levels. However Vicky has now started A-levels in a friendly, accepting college where "there's many different types of people passing through". Before she had accepted her father's view of life as a kind of siege situation where the family kept apart, and kept working, but the new situation has "really changed my outlook on life and education." With this change come new linguistic contrasts that challenge her father's framework of somewhere/nowhere. Vicky now asserts, "there's a real life other than education", and sees new dilemmas beyond coping with racism: "my life has become just work and no play."

Vicky may have absorbed the new thematic structure of her peer group but she also attempts to incorporate this new framework into her allegiance with her family. She reviews her relationship with her parents in a process that seems to have a bearing on which messages she might choose to hear. She reflects, "My mum and nan were (and are) always there for me when I needed them. And I really love them for that." About schoolwork her mother has taken the view, "it's your life.......it's purely your own decision. I'll stand by you." On the other hand, despite his encouragement, "When it comes to my Pop there's a big gap in my mind. I hardly ever see him because he's at work all day.............He often says that we (me and my three sisters) 'don't know him'. As scary a thought as it may be, I think he's right."

The narrative suggests that Vicky is finding schoolwork restrictive but that she will not openly challenge her father. Instead she draws on linguistic clichés that will put a protective gloss over her strategy of inaction. Glossing over her mother's assurance that she will support her whatever her "decision" Vicky concentrates on the possibly fatalistic aspects of "it's your life" and seems to be adapting this into permission to let her educational aspirations slip away. She finishes her narrative with her identity left to chance, "whatever will be, will be" and in her final sentence, "I'll leave my life up to destiny and follow whichever path in life is mine."

Conclusion

Set between home and peer group the girls' approach to schoolwork may involve many aspects of the self, touching on issues of confidence and acceptance, independence and security. The narratives show that the negotiations the girls are involved in, and the strategies they adopt, as they seek their 'voice' about schoolwork, are all part of the process of defining identity. The texts demonstrate the ways that girls experiment with the voices they hear; the voices of people they love, esteem, fear or wish to emulate. The language they use to represent the events they have experienced and the ways they have dealt with those events may vary, depending on the variety of perspectives the girl is attempting to incorporate in her life. Sometimes a disparity between views of the world evident in different linguistic frameworks may lead her to confusion, change, or even crisis. At times the girl may represent herself as finding her true voice, as recognising her own identity; at other times girls acknowledge that their personal history ties them to the language of a particular world view that in their own terms constrains their agency.

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LIFE HISTORY & CREATIVE WRITING: FOUR DEGREE-LEVEL PROJECTS AT THE UNIVERSITY OF WOLVERHAMPTON

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We run a writing workshop as a credited module in the second year of our MODDS (humanities) degree. Students who have completed this module and shown themselves to be particularly capable can choose to write a final year English dissertation incorporating creative work. During the 1992-3 academic year,the first two projects combining life history with creative writing were completed. The second two were completed this year, 1993-4.

As leader of the writing workshop, and initiator of student work on the topic of life histories with creative writing, I have had the pleasure and challenge of supervising the projects. These were double-semester studies with a required length of 15,000 words. They were shaped to meet MODDS Degree Guidelines for English projects, recently revised to support work which crosses traditional boundaries. These guidelines include (1) justification for the choice of topic, subject material, and perspective adopted (2) demonstration of research skills, (3) a demonstration of progress from the material researched to a critical and/or creative outcome, and (4) adequate referencing and bibliography.

Working with these directives posed special challenges for the projects which differed both in subject and approach from traditional studies of literary writing. Drawing on the four projects, Lavender Lady by Jean Brownhill, The Job That's Nearest by Rachel Beard, The Apple Stories by Susan Hulse, and Pictures of Beatrice by Gillian Sutton, I would like to highlight issues that arose and to describe some of the resolutions. These are but indicative of the many issues revealed by the work we did together and of others which might have been revealed. Given the restraints of a short paper, I've had to be selective. Topics left out include: (1) prologues to subject choice, (2) rendering spoken dialect, (3) use of the tape recorder, (4) differences in student background, and (5) differences in the range and balance of structural features and in narrative voice. Included are: (1) the scope and time-span of the project, (2) the students and the choice of subject, (3) research procedures, and (4) finding a structure.

i. The scope and time-span of the project

From the onset, it was clear that these projects would require more input than projects designed around traditional literary studies because, in addition to library research, there was both field work and a creative writing element. Decisions had to be made about what material to seek and what methods to use. The methods had to be applied, reviewed and, as necessity determined, revised. Once the material had been gathered and put in chronological order, a further set of decisions had to be made about how the story was to be told. Once drafted, it had to be analysed and redrafted. For all phases, students were asked to record and comment on their procedures. Last, they were to reflect on the completed project and to write an afterword. In the afterword, they were not only to consider what they had uncovered and written but also further steps that might be taken. So we agreed to extend the work period by four months, (beyond the semester season) beginning in June of the previous academic year.

This enabled the students to conduct interviews and collect information from other sources during the summer holiday as well as to read useful literary works, to have information in hand to begin writing at the start of the autumn semester, to complete a first draft by the end of the Christmas holiday and then to rework, edit, and complete in standard format to meet the end of May deadline.

ii. The students and choice of subject

Given the scope and complexity of the project, it is perhaps no accident that the four students are mature women and all are mothers and two already grandmothers; and that after some deliberation, three of the four chose to write the life story of one of their grandmothers while the fourth, writing a collection of family tales, included a story about two grandmothers. The settings for the four are: the town of Dudley in the Black Country, a mining village in West Yorkshire, a farming community on the Welsh border of Herefordshire, and landed gentry in Hastings- by-the-Sea.

Two students wrote about grandmothers they had never met, the others about grandmothers they had seen on only a few occasions. As Jean observed in her discussion of this choice, the grandmother was a distant figure. She was a mythical person like someone from a fairytale. Gillian's note on her own decision is similar. I never knew her and she simply wasn't spoken of.... I decided to take my grandmothers invisible life and give her prominence. Jean explained that she began to wonder about her grandmothers life when she made her mother a grandmother. She never did anything about it. She had three children pretty quick and they kept her pretty busy. Her grandmother stayed in the back of her mind though (for over twenty years). Rachel Beard started with her own childhood but soon found that she too wanted to focus on women in earlier generations She hoped to include her great-grandmother whom she knew only through stories passed on by my mother. She explained, These people didn't have a voice. She saw herself as recording these lives to save them for (her) grandchildren.

In retrospect, I see the advantages of this choice. The students began with very little information; Jean, for example, whose grandmother died before she was born, with these two facts: (l) her grandmother sold lavender door-to-door , (2) her grandmother had red hair. No one had her birth or death certificates, no pictures, no family Bible, nothing that could provide me with tangible evidence that she existed. This lack of detail coupled with the research undertaken, and the gathering of contradictory versions of stories about the subject, supports a creative reconstruction of the life. While a more scholarly option might be to record each version, the aim of these projects was different: to apply creative writing techniques to the portrayal of a life story; in other words, to land the mythical person on her feet in her place and time and to breathe life (and words) into her. No one knew what she did say but it was possible to imagine what she might have said. Uncovered family history backed by social history set the stage and then the imagination had to go to work.

iii Research procedures

While research combined book and field work, each student found her own balance in relation to these forms. The students were encouraged to be innovative, to discover which techniques might best serve their individual undertaking and could be used. In other words, they had to think in practical as well as theoretical terms. For instance, while a face-to-face interview with her father, might have best served Gillian, since he lives in New Zealand she had to use prompting phone calls to encourage him to write down what he remembered about his mother. Similarly Sue turned to the telephone as her primary interviewing mode. As mentioned, Jean had no photographs. In contrast both Rachel and Gillian collected and included family photographs and drew details from them into their texts. Also, they included copies of photographs in their project submission. Indeed, for Gillian, the photograph became a major organising principle and her Pictures of Beatrice concludes with a picture of Beatrice drawn by Gillians eight year old daughter. Here two felt-tipped girls, great-grandmother and great-grand-daughter, one holding a hoop, the other a skipping rope, stand hand-in-hand. Although photographs were available to Sue, and during the visit she made to her parents home in Yorkshire, she and her parents had a look through the albums, the photographs weren't necessary to her. The pictures were already in her head and, in support of them, a wealth of family stories from a family which has always taken time to tell stories.

A brief catalogue of methods employed and material used in support of these methods includes: visits and interviews with members of the family, (pestering, Jean calls it), phone calls to members of the family, letters written in search of information, family letters collected as research text, and as Rachel mentions, collections of memorabilia such as the recipe book written in her grandmothers own hand and dating from the 1890ies when she was Head Cook at the home of local gentry.

Additionally the students undertook book-research. The bibliographies include an average of twenty entries with more diversity than overlap. In common, the students consulted books (1) on storytelling, such as STORY TELLING PROCESS AND PRACTICE, by Livo and Rietz; (2) on oral history, such as THE VOICE OF THE PAST by Paul Thompson; and (3) some corresponding works of fiction such as THREE WOMEN by Gertrude Stein in which the lives of the women are artfully portrayed and WILD SWANS by Jung Chang in which stories play a major role in the narrative of three generations of women. All of them also consulted history texts. In addition Jean chose COLLINS POCKET GUIDE TO WILD FLOWERS to find out where and when lavender grew. She also turned to BLOCKSIDGES DIRECTORIES 1922 and 1938 for lists of the main occupations and shops in the town so she could better picture the setting in which her mother walked with her grandmother to sell the lavender. By identifying local industries in the setting, Jean was able to include the smells and noises associated with them (but absent from historical records) and to bring the scene to life for the reader. For corresponding reasons, Gillian turned to WOMEN IN WORLD WAR ONE, A Living History Factpac, and she spent time in the libraries of Bexhill and Hastings looking through local newspapers, maps, census forms and historical records. Rachel looked at A SERVANTS PLACE by P Sambrook, and Sue to HOW TO WRITE A FAMILY HISTORY by Smith and Hugh, COMMON BONDS, produced by the National Oralcy Project and HARD TIMES by Charles Dickens to review fact versus fancy because of the degree of fancy she was uncovering.

iv. Finding a structure

While chronology served as an organising principle and in the first draft, the students arranged the information collected in note form into a chronological record, each sought further cohering modes. This proved more difficult than anticipated. For instance, remembering the worn patchwork quilt she had used when she stayed with her grandmother during the Second World War, Rachel hoped to stitch together a patchwork of stories. She envisioned a combination of bright and sombre colours, shiny and dull surfaces, rough and smooth textures as a metaphor for life. Working toward this poetic conception, she wrote two lengthy chapters before she saw that the design was too ambitious for the scope of the project and it demanded an exceptional facility in writing skills. She then turned back to chronology and began to shape chapters on this principle finding for each of six a focal point around which the narrative could find its pattern and through which she could develop a line of feeling for the reader to follow. In the first chapter which treats her mothers childhood in a tied cottage on the Welch border, Rachel, as writer and narrator, builds to the moment in Eliza's eighth year when the body of her father is brought home on a hurdle. Rachel creates a scene, enlivening it with detail to help us to recognize the dimension of the tragedy and the changes it brings to the life of the family, lowering them from respectable poverty to destitution. Eliza is in the garden picking currants for a pudding and looking after her blind baby sister when the commotion starts. Your Mam's asking for you, Liza, a neighbour said, ...She took the brothers and the baby back to her own cottage and Eliza, in the words of St. Paul, put away childish things and went to her mother. As she passed the current bushes, the little bowl that she had been filling such a short time ago, still stood there. It had tipped sideways and the black currants were strewn in the grass. The crumpled blanket where the baby had lain still bore her mark and the sun was still shining. But Eliza's world had changed for ever.

Rachel's work is illustrative of that of that of the others in that each section of the narrative is shaped around a dramatic incident. Additionally images are used as design features. These link sections, support the progress of the life and often also connect the generations. Jean uses her grandmothers hair to help tell her life story. In her childhood, it is thick unruly red. Later, when she is pregnant with her illegitimate child, it causes her to be described as a wild gipsy women. Later yet, when she has four children to feed, it serves a practical need and at the same time is shown to be integral to her sense of self. She sells her hair to a wig-maker. This was another means of earning money..but it took a long time for her hair to grow and and she wasn't happy when it was short. She felt part of her identity was missing. She felt incomplete. In later years the red turns salt and pepper. Finally, 46 years after her death, Jeans daughter gave birth to Jeans first grandchild and he has the red hair of his great, great grandmother.

Sue gave her stories heightened meaning through the recurring image of the apple, a fruit of supreme importance to the family because of her fathers experience in a Siberian prisoner-of-war cam where a fellow prisoner, a Jewish doctor, befriended him in his starvation with the gift of an apple.

Three months into her research, Gillian suddenly discovered real estate. Her grandfather was a well-known property developer and substantial family homes were bought and sold with a disarming ease. In the journal she wrote while working on her project, Gillian noted, Each chapter can be a different house, also representing a different stage in their lives and status.

Further design features emerged. Five months after her discovery of the real estate motif, Gillian added, One of the first details I got of my grandmother was the image of her sitting on the clifftop believing she was a princess who lived in a white palace. ...Tomorrow I'm going to try and work out a system combing fairytale and reality. If I can manage that successfully, then the emerging picture of my grandmother will probably be as close to the real thing as I can make it. Gillian wrote four tales which retell in different form chapters employing literary realism and identified by dates. These tales, The tale of Benjamin, The tale of T C, The tale of the Mountain, and The tale of the Legacy introduce and separate the four sections of the main narrative and give a universal dimension to events in the particularized life.

Similarly Sue discovered a complementary genre which added dimension to the telling of her stories. This evolved from the phone calls to her parents. After Sue recounted the first one for me, I suggested she write it down. From then on she took notes during the conversations and wrote them up immediately afterwards. These records soon began to take on a rhythm and shape of their own. Moreover, they fed directly into the stories, showing us the development from sketch to finished draft. Sue decided to include the telephone conversations in the main body of the text, placing them in order, each in relation to the story which it feeds. An effect, and I mention but one of many, is to show the family creating its stories together out of the history which the parents and daughter, in a three-way conversation, are remembering aloud.

Much more could be said about the process, content, and importance of these projects for the students and their readers. But let me end with a extract from one of Sues telephone interviews. It was recorded while she was working on a story about the apple pie which her mother made with the Polish relatives for Susans Polish grandfathers funeral. In this fragment , the death of Susans grandmother-in-law links two family losses and extends the significance of the finished story by moving into the past from the present.

Mother: (Mam tells dad) Stan, gran died this morning.
Dad: Danny's gran.. Oh dear, I'm very sorry.
Mother: Poor old lass... I don't know. How are you?
Susan: I'm alright.
Mother: Well, how old was she when you lived with her?
Susan: 1975 so she was 75...still working then. She helped in the kitchens across the road.
Mother: Blooming eck!
Susan: Grandad worked too. He was about 80 then. He cleaned up and did odd jobs in the factory.
Mother: ...That generation knew nothing but hard work. I think they were born to work. Look at your grandad in Poland. He was working on the harvest right up to his death.
Susan: Yes, I was thinking about that this morning...
Mother: Was you? Well times like these you think about other losses.

'AUTOBIOGRAPHY UNIT' - A CASE STUDY

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Introduction

This paper offers a brief overview of the Autobiography Unit for Media and Design students at the University of Portsmouth, School of Art Media and Design. The intention is to identify which kinds of question are raised when autobiography is used as an originating concept for practical media work? Also to ask how these questions can be employed in the development of personal creative skills?

To begin with it may be useful to provide some background information on the philosophy of the course. One fundamental different that exists between courses, at various institutions, is the manner in which media products are considered for assessment. On some courses media products are perceived as individual creative acts, as opposed to social acts. The philosophy of our course is not driven by adherence to any particular tradition of production, but by a belief in the need for accountability in a social context. What we are implying is that we do not accept that traditions are value free, or that the vocabulary of the ineffable offers adequate explanation.

Students are expected to engage with a broad range of skills both practical and theoretical. The degree has a very strong history and theory core which accounts for a third of the final degree mark. The aim of the unit is to provide a supportive environment in which students can develop patterns of explanation, which allow for the objectifying of experiences. Students are encouraged to investigate ways in which these 'explanations' can be viewed as central to the formation of identity. They are further asked to consider ways in which their research findings can be developed in other projects.

The Students

Our admissions policy looks very favourably on mature students, currently less than 30% of students come direct from school; maintaining a balance of gender and cultural difference is also considered during recruitment. Thus very different sets of life experience are brought to the unit. The average number students catered for is twenty and the unit runs over one semester.

The Unit

Assessment takes into account a set of loose learning goals, which are prearranged between the student and tutor. These learning goals are formed on the basis of an originating concept which the student has identified. The early part of the unit introduces students to a variety of concepts associated with the making of personal testament. Students are encouraged to explore literary theories concerned with autobiography and draw on their conclusions when formulating their own autobiographical works. During this period students are expected to identify a learning programme which indicates texts intended for study, these should be both primary and secondary in nature, and include visual media.

Embarking on their degree studies is a very significant time. Students are not required to produce an intimate expose but they are encouraged to look at the changes taking place around them and with which they are connected. Indeed , for many this time signals a period of painful transition. Looking for a place to live, managing finances, making new friends and, for a large number, being away from home for the first time, all contribute to a turbulent and exciting period in an individual's life history.

The difficulty of these transitions surfaces in students' comments on their work, for example:

> *'After leaving college in 1987 I was thrown into looking for work, jobs in the media were near impossible to get so joining the family business was tempting. I loved cars...but I wanted to make programmes, I was torn...My idea for the project is basically about how I decided to come to Portsmouth and how difficult it was for me to make that decision.'C.S.*

> *'..that is of course my main worry about coming to live in an area of so few blacks. That protection I feel at home, when I'm surrounded by people of the same group, is not here at all. I feel safe there. Here that is taking away from me, and I just wanted to show the audience the reason for my fear' D.T.*

Developing Learning Goals.

Contact sessions start with workshops where students are encouraged to present written and/or spoken accounts of what they have in the way of expectations of the course, accounts of their previous educational experience or, if they wish, a particular event in their life. The object of these sessions is to create an environment of trust where students feel secure enough to deal with personal issues. This can prove very difficult for some students and resistance must be respected. We have found that those who are resistant are often much more related about making expressive statements which explore representations of identity, using focusing on themselves as the subject.

If one of the educational motivations for engaging with the production process is to bring about self-learning, then in what ways can such exploration lead to the development of new visual principles and expand the potential of visual learning? Taking the above into consideration students are asked to ponder a number of questions:

> Does philosophical introspection need to be preserved and should these activities be examined in the light of new media?
>
> In which ways can autobiography, as an art form, stimulate intellectual inquiry?
>
> How can screened autobiographies improve general aesthetic awareness?
>
> Can screen based texts provide sensual and emotional enrichment?

Initial research into these questions should be drawn upon when students are formulating learning goals.

Assessment
Although the Unit is assessed it is important to note that what is being assessed, it is not the students' life experience, but their approach to a brief. The assessment of practical work is always difficult and perhaps more so in the case of autobiographical work. In so much as the work is assessed, acknowledgement must be given to the possibility that this will result in inhibitions, where students do not have the confidence or desire to reveal themselves whilst they are vulnerable to assessment.

The Work.
Compared to the written word screened images create very different sets of syntactical possibilities. For example there is an intrinsic part about mediated images which is disguised or highlighted as narrative strategies demand. Recognising these differences one is drawn to question whether or not visual media can offer as replete a form as the written work? If the answer to the previous question is not then we must ask what will happen to our perception of ourselves if the dominant form of person record is audio visual rather than written?

In general students tended to work on the basis that the televisual was no more or less 'authentic' than the written work, as one student put it:

> *'Many authors, i.e. Rousseau, think about autobiography as the student of the self by the self to enhance personal knowledge and understanding. When writing autobiography you are confessing to your self, but in our project...we are not confessing to anything, this goes too deep. The project...has less in common with Rousseau than with Shari Benstock, who said of the self: "autobiography reveals the impossibility of its own dream: what begins on the presumption of self-knowledge ends in the creation of a fiction.'C.S.*

All the students in the group under discussion, maintained a single central narrating voice. This was not always in the form of a voice-over but more often at the level of a metadiscourse where the author's many selves are being ordered into a coherent expression. Many students also attempted to use narrative structures which distanciated the audience in such a way as to invite a more subjective reception.

The use of first, second or third person 'voices' as narrative expedients such as those common in written autobiographies are implied by various devices such as flash back and changing the point of view of the authoring subject. Playing with time in this way allows a fictional future to be called upon as in this student's work:

> *The introduction of a second character who would observe the leading protagonist (myself) confused or lost in and around Portsmouth University, and would recall how he had similar experiences...' N.C.*

Occasionally completely new persona are introduced replacing the 'real' character altogether, this approach is usually expressive although this does not always exclude the use of documentarist icons, for example:

> *'A collection of shorts with students describing their own first term experiences. particularly phrases or situations which I could presumably identify with would be edited together, so that the sum total is a representation of my own experience.' N.C.*

Journey is another predominant motif:

> *'My original idea was to produce an autobiography in the form of a letter, using images and narration to portray the journey from St.Helens to Portsmouth.' B.L.*

The past is often evoked via personal archival material in a way which is noticeably changing the kinds of tapes made. Recently students have employed more material, shot on domestic family VTRs, to supplement their own productions. The aesthetic of television diaries is also a common practice, although in this group, where direct address was made to camera, persona or distanciating devices were also used. The implication here might be that these devices were employed to shield the subject. One problem that this kind of reading invites is that of down grading the 'expressive' as a significant and readable form by comparison to the documentarist approach. For example, in one instance the distanciating devices used were intended merely as a demonstration of technical skill. For some students problems also arise out of the changing context of archive photographs and recordings, in some instances this resulted in the exclusion of the archive material for fear of inappropriate readings. For example, one student discussing images of a church in her work says:

> *'The sequence relates to my marriage in 1978 and the birth of my daughter...I was not married in a church but in a register office surrounded by scaffolding and I didn't want to give the impression that my marriage was being propped up.' B.S.*

Some Responses

In conclusion some comments on the contribution the unit makes to the degree as a whole. What were the experiences of the students during the unit and what educational contributions has autobiography, as a conceptual tool, made to their praxis?

Experiments in autobiography are used as a direct route into thinking about creativity in general and as a tool for realising the experiential nature of education many degree finalists are now drawing on ideas concerned with identity.

> *'There are many ways of telling a life story, I had to choose the particular style which suited what I wanted to say.' A.J.*

A small number of the students questioned felt that this unit would be more profitable later in the course, when they had acquired better technical and organisational skills. Where this response was given the students suggested that they would be more able to concentrate on the content without having to devote so much of their energy to acquiring technical skills. Students in the above category did, however, agree that there were also specific benefits in having this as their first experience of degree work. Also noted was the need to use other members of the course to 'crew'. This they felt was difficult when they had not had much time to get to know each other. Although this would be the case what ever the project, given that they were dealing with personal identity as an issue, it was noted as a particular problem.

Most of the students were of the opinion that the *'use of light, music, editing, colour, mise en scene or particular images...give the film feeling, mood and structure.'* This is not a very challenging view point, any audio visual text might be regarded in this way; where students did see particular strengths was in the use of a medium which allowed *'the incorporation of verbal, visual and emotional aspects of a life.'*

> *'Initially I had conceived this project as a separate entity, alienated from the rest of my studies. It became clear to me, however, that by analysing different cultural and social issues (such as the meaning of artist or designer) and the history of the medium*

> *in which I am working, I can criticise my own work and batter understand the forces which influence it.'N.C.*

There is not the space, here, to raise the many other questions that the unit provokes. At the forefront of these are two issues which question:

i whether or not 'the autobiographical', as distinct from autobiography, can be read in the way that other life histories are read?

ii whether or not it is possible to give the same account of one's life in an audio-visual as opposed to a written form?

It has not been the intention of this paper to provide answers but to raise questions which draw attention to the difference between written and televisualised autobiographies. In this much the paper may be regarded as work in progress. It is to be hoped that further debate on this subject will provide us with new tools for the examination of all 'televised' life histories.

LIFE HISTORY, DISABILITY and SPECIAL EDUCATION

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Introduction

The courses produced by my group explore issues of disability, disaffection and difficulties in learning. In this paper I am going to give some examples of how we have included life histories, firstly in the published course materials themselves and secondly in the assignments we have set for our students. I shall conclude by arguing that teaching and learning relationships which minimise students' experiences of difficulties in learning will be characterised by an autobiographical approach.

Life History in Open University course materials

From a past to a history

One of our aims in producing course materials was to give a voice to those who have previously been denied one. We made a radio programme called "Never wink at a teacher", an oral history of experiences of special education in Scotland.

Harry and Terry, both about my own age, had been pupils at a large day school outside Dundee for children with physical and mental disabilities. They have very different views of their education:

Harry:

> "I would say it was more like a.. it gave me the impression it was like a prison. it wasn't a place would say where I could have been educated, as I found out in later years. Most of my time because I'm physically handicapped was taken up with the occupational side, therapy and that, and I lost a lot of education there where I could have been getting it in a normal school. What I hated there was not finding out how I was getting on - how my progress was. No way was I going get any qualifications at the end of it really.....
>
> Painting was the only way I could escape when I was at school. From a very early age it was the only way I could escape. There was not other way of escaping sort of thing and when I was in classes, maybe history, I would sit and draw maps and never pay attention to the class because I was bored because I would know that at the end of the day that was it - nothing out of it. You know, I was writing a sentence and I was not getting anything out of it at all - any satisfaction. Whereas, like art, art was, well I used to really enjoy it and the art teacher and myself had an understanding, that was why I was the only one in my class that got special tuition, because I thought he sort of knew that I had the ability to do art, where he felt it would be better that way than to lose myself in a class of a thing I was not very interested in,,, And he has given me something as well, he has created something, an awareness of other things around me...not only art but including other things which was a way of seeing other things through art for myself...

Terry:

> "I did not think it was a handicapped school, I thought it was just a normal school where you got lessons and that's it....
>
> Well, the teacher I had, God bless his soul, he's dead now, Mr Davies...he was a grand old teacher, he was my buddy, he was my pet teacher...
>
> Oh, I was walking, walking up the corridor, and you know, how the, like the cavalry, two by two, and I sees a teacher I really fancied you know, oh she was a honkish bit of stuff, so I seen her coming towards us and I just went like that and she says "Terrence Creogh, you must never wink at a teacher like that"....
>
> I felt I've got a different point of view from Harry. As I was saying, I liked school and he did not like it. I liked it. In fact if I got a chance I would go back. I really would go back."

Speaking for ourselves

Terry is nostalgic for his schooldays; Harry is bitter. in another radio programme: "Speaking for Ourselves", four school leavers reflect on their education. They also disagree about their experiences of segregated schooling:

Colin:

> "We used to have a concrete playground like any normal school you'd see, you know, out in the road. And we used to play football on that. There used to be a group of us...it wasn't just the haemophiliacs that used to play..we used to have people that were on crutches playing, and perhaps they would play in goal, or we used to have people in wheelchairs that would play in goal. So everyone used to be involved and they didn't use to stop that....So we were kept pretty fit although my mum and dad weren't too keen on my playing football. They used to tell the teachers, if you see him playing, stop him..They didn't use to restrict you....
>
> We always used to do woodwork there and I can always remember coming home one day...saying to my mum and dad, oh have you got 50 pence and they turned round and said, why..what do you want that for? I said, oh I've made a stool at work, and they said, a stool? I said, yeah, at woodwork and my mum nearly went through the roof, she was absolutely...that was about it. I'd said enough then. And its still standing over there, so it's quite good really...
>
> There was only one option open to me..and I had to take it. Looking back I can't really say that, yes, I would have preferred it any other way. I had a good education...and I don't really mind...how I got it."

Christine:

> "Personally, I can never see why it was called a special school, only from the point of view that it got all the visually handicapped together and that the staff were supposed to be trained in educating the visually handicapped. That again is an argument that I would reject, because in quite a number of cases the staff didn't know Braille. I was having to write essays in Braille and type them up afterwards so that the

> teaching staff could read them...I think an awful lot of them are teachers that couldn't cope in ordinary education and it's easier to work with a small group of blind children where the expectations are not as high, where there's not the pressure to get them through their exams...
>
> I could see that I was way, way behind educationally. Mainly, I think, because of the teaching staff that seemed to think that if children couldn't see, they couldn't learn either..."
>
> "Unless I chose to tell you, you wouldn't know"

Another reason for collecting autobiographical accounts is that they give us access to unique material. Project 1 of our postgraduate course asks for a study of pupil perspectives on learning. In one of the Readers Corinne Grant reflects on what she describes as her "invisible disability":

> "Thicko, spastic, nurd, stupid. All of these names have been applied to me over the last 15 years, at first by other children but some adults have also voiced this opinion. Some have not been brave enough to say it to my face, but there are a few that have. I wish sometimes people would stop and think, or, as the saying goes, "engage their brain before they open their mouths". Maybe then I wouldn't feel such an outsider.....
>
> I grew up in a small village and went to the local school, where my life consisted of being picked on, mostly by other children but sometimes the teachers would also have their say.
>
> I remember being sat in assembly on my sixth birthday and being asked how old I was. I was so nervous I couldn't say a word. In the end they gave up and asked my brother. When I got back to class the teacher turned round on me and asked if I was an idiot. I asked if I could go to the loo. When she said yet I left the class like my feet were on fire. Now it's just part of my life I would like to forget but if memories were that easy to forget I guess a lot of my life would have been erased...

(To appear in Potts, P.et al.,1994.)

Life history in student assignments

One assignment asked students to listen to, record and discuss the stories of people whose experiences of learning or teaching were very different to their own. Sarah interviewed a blind man, then in his eighties, who had been a private tutor of English and French, having been refused a job in school. He told her that, when he went to a residential special school at the age of five, the education authorities took over the role of his parents and that this resulted in a permanent estrangement. He also said that there was little information and guidance when he was young, for example on the importance of developing his sense of touch.

Reflecting on the value of the interview, Sarah says:

> "Any feelings of pity are very quickly dispelled on meeting this remarkable man; this is one value of speaking personally to a handicapped person. Much evidence on the effect of handicap has been discovered by research on groups, but individuals differ...

> Talking to him also gives an insight into how blind people feel about other people's reactions to them and the sighted person's attitude to blindness, which is very different from their own.
>
> Collecting an oral history also can help us to see how a handicapped person can be an active agent in shaping their own lives and our attitude to them. Perhaps the greatest value is that memory is selective, therefore what they remember years later must be of greater significance than what has been forgotten."

For another assignment, Helen wrote about herself, comparing her life as a child and as a teacher:

> "In 1938 (aged 8) I started school in a wicker bed on wheels parked outside the classroom door. As my reading ability was reasonably advanced and, as I couldn't sit up, I listed to readers must of the day. In the winter it was decided this was not viable, so I stayed at home and work was sent in. Since it was never marked I lost interest. Finally a peripatetic teacher visited for one hour three times a week and I really began to work. Two months later the teacher joined the armed forces.....
>
> Many excellent special schools (now) face closure and ordinary schools face swingeing cuts. We are assured that specialist help and additional resources will be made available in ordinary schools but as a class teacher in a school which has seen severe staffing and other cuts, I view the prospect with a jaundiced eye. My experience of coping with a brain damaged child in a class of 25 4-year-olds, for two years, with no help, is not conducive to optimism.
>
> Special units in ordinary schools would seem the ideal...From my previous history and hindsight as an ordinary class teacher, at the age of 55 I don't see how I could have coped with me at the age of 8!"

Personal experience, affirmation and the capacity of learn

Corinne Grant says: "With the help of my husband, I'm learning I'm as good as the rest". Her confidence and positive self-image were triggered by the affirmative relationship. Harry and Christine, contributors to our radio programmes, both felt that they were seen as educationally incompetent because they had physical disabilities. Christine was more successful than Harry in her struggle to redefine her capabilities. Harry stayed close to the person with whom he had a positive relationship.

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CROSSING CULTURAL DIVIDES: A LIFE HISTORY EXPLORATION OF ACQUIRED EDUCATIONAL VALUES AND BELIEF SYSTEMS AMONG ADULTS FROM THREE DIFFERENT COMMUNITIES IN THE CONTEXT OF LANCASTER UNIVERSITY'S OUTREACH PROGRAMME.

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This paper outlines some preliminary findings from research which started in March 1993. In the paper I discuss the background to the research and offer a snapshot of some emerging themes resulting from the first round of interviews. Although the study raises a number of challenging methodological issues, these are the subject of another paper.

Background to the Study: identifying who to research and why

Lancaster University Department of Continuing Education initiated an outreach programme three years ago, which aimed to increase participation in university adult education by people who are disproportionately under-represented in its mainstream courses. Whilst no one definition describes such adults, they are generally distinguished by virtue of their early school leaving age, minimal academic qualifications and manual or blue-collar occupations (Woodley et al, 1987, Sargant 1991, McGivney, 1990, 1992). Furthermore, their socio economic status and qualifications are frequently a result of educational disadvantage linked to gender, disability or race issues (Kaushal 1988, Dadzie 1990, Barnes 1991, Metcalf 1993).

Whilst a number of theories link participation to emotional, psychological and cultural influences as well as practical issues, (for example, McClusky 1963, Miller 1967 and Jarvis 1987), writers such as Cross (1981), Sargant (1991) and Maguire et al (1993) highlight the need for research evidence which examines these factors in detail, particularly in relation to cultural sub groups. The outreach programme provided a specific context for some unanswered questions.

The context was university education as a distinctive and essentially separate cultural entity which had to match the needs of a variety of outreach contacts with their own cultures and life values. The need to build a relationship between university learning and the experience and values of such diverse groups was the impetus for generating the research questions. For instance, how have people acquired their belief systems and perceptions of education? How do they perceive universities in relation to their own learning potential? What is the effect of university intervention into the learning lives of these groups and are there distinctive cultural values towards education and learning which might inform future practice?

McGivney (1990) emphasises the need for a personal approach when obtaining information about educational participation issues. Use of oral history as a means of gathering qualitative data seemed a natural way to proceed. Indeed, Thomson's own conference paper at last year's SCUTREA conference affirms this view:

> "... the process of remembering could be a key to understanding the ways in which certain individual and collective versions of the past are active in the present" (Thomson 1993, p 98)

The Process

I chose for my study three adult communities who had received some continuity of experience with the outreach programme and with whom positive relationships were forming. Two groups were interviewed by role model contacts, who could relate more closely than I to the social and educational backgrounds of their learners. As I was the most consistent course tutor for the third group, disabled adults from a social services day centre, I became their interviewer, though the views of disabled tutors were also recorded.

The empirical data is drawn primarily from the three outreach learner groups - consisting of ten working class older adults; ten disabled adults and ten Asian women from two different communities. They will be interviewed again later this year, along with key community contacts and tutors.

Twenty five of the thirty interviewees were women. All interviews were taped and transcribed. The Asian women were interviewed in their mother tongue and their responses translated by the interviewer into a second tape for transcribing.

Findings from the first set of learner interviews.

Space only permits a sketch of salient issues for each learner group. A brief summary of each group offers some context for these points, which can be expanded at the conference workshop.

Portside

Portside is a small town in South Cumbria, with shipbuilding as its main industry. Recent mass redundancies have created an uncertain future for the residents. Most of the selected interview group were aged between 40 and 70 years. All were born and bred in the town. All seven women and three men attended a family history course, with the opportunity to attend subsequent local history courses.

Common life history experiences included a minimum school leaving age followed by factory, shop work or construction jobs, though most progressed to positions of responsibility in adulthood. School and family memories often presented a picture of education being valued either at home or school but seldom as a continuous process or as a positive contribution to work goals. Self images of low achievement often related to how people were taught: "I just needed to be shown how to do it" or levels of encouragement: "I just needed that little push". Many people felt confused about the purpose of higher education, compared to clearly defined apprenticeship or day release from work schemes. For instance, some felt that: "People who go to university ought to have an aim in their mind" and were puzzled by the apparent outcomes of such an education: "What amazes me is that people say they have been to university and when they come out ... they don't know what they're going to do".

One particular value of the outreach experience was its interest level to the whole family. This, coupled with the fact that more than half the interviewees attended with a spouse or relative, helped to overcome traditional fears of 'university' courses. Their appreciation of the learning experience was that: "It was a group thing ... more of a leisurely type of thing where you could say, excuse, can you explain". Moreover, continued interest is now supported by a family history society, initiated by the student group.

Their comments suggest that acquired attitudes have mystified the idea of education as a contribution to lifelong learning. The family history activity, for this group, had a collective ethos which could be pursued at a leisurely pace. This contrasted with the traditional image of university study as isolated and independent learning, achieved only through sustained, rather than intermittent study.

Wyrevale Day Centre

Wyrevale Day Centre is funded by Social Services. It provides activities and trips to adults with disabilities on a placement system of one or two days a week. Most interviewees had been attending for several years. Commonalities for this group were their experience of disability (three were born disabled), long term unemployment and a relationship to the centre. The participants attended a variety of personal development courses, with the opportunity to attend one or two short courses on local topics. The majority were aged between 40 and 55 years.

Although the Wyrevale participants also have working class roots, their initial unskilled work experience rarely extended into positions of responsibility. For the three people born with cerebral palsy, this was a direct result of poor school and employer attitudes. The other seven people acquired their disability later in life. Consequent medical and social attitudes contributed to their permanent state of unemployment and ultimate arrival at Wyrevale. Their childhood educational memories, however, were consistently poor, irrespective of disability, often exacerbated by a range of emotionally disturbing experiences. All used the phrase: "You weren't encouraged". Many had expressed a preference for practical subjects at school, but these had been disregarded academically, helping to disassociate further the relationship between learning ability and their subsequent, practical jobs. Responses to adult education reflected their existing passive and dependency roles, rather than the autonomous state of adulthood. For instance, a common expectation was that adult education would be "brought to" them: "Nobody asked me, that's why I didn't go". The adult education system, therefore, which relies on proactive initiatives, bypasses this group, irrespective of their actual or potential learning interest.

Arguably, then, for many in this group the accumulative effect of alienation at school, work and social levels contributed to exclusive, as well as indistinguishable, images of further or higher education. These resulted in distorted self images as potential learners, in spite of a keen interest in the learning process offered to them through the outreach programme. For instance, a crucial aspect of the courses, appreciated by all the participants, was the opportunity to feedback, in sharp contrast to their perceived lifelong experiences of not being heard: "It was to the people and feedback ... not just blah, what she wanted to say ... we were given time".

Asian Women's Groups

The Asian interviews were drawn from two different communities in Lancashire - one Hindu and one Muslim. Women from both groups had come to England on marriage. They attended the courses primarily to improve their English. The Muslim group followed a series of welfare rights courses and the Hindu women studied personal development related topics.

The Asian women were thirty years younger than the previous groups and came from a wide socio-economic background. One had left school at the age of 9, others had received college education. Their educational memories were consistently positive, recalling strong parental encouragement and expressing a positive self image of their learning ability. Education was equated with status and independence. These values were intertwined with a keen sense of community harmony, often within religious and family responsibilities. Many of the interviewees, however, were caught in a tide of rapid developments from the sub continent, which no longer reflected the more conservative attitudes towards women by their

England-based in-laws who had arrived a generation earlier. The women consequently presented a continuum of attitudes, ranging from acceptance and contentment with the traditional values of motherhood, to frustration at denied opportunities for women in a patriarchal society.

Two aspects affected perceptions of university education. Firstly university in the sub continent was only associated with postgraduate study, while colleges provided degree level teaching. Furthermore universities suffered a traditional image of westernised corruption which would, for women in particular, "lead you astray". The compromise for women's higher education was to study close to home. The community based outreach programme, therefore, had a special meaning for the interviewees, signifying a high status as well as respect for their own values: "I'm very grateful to the university for providing opportunities to Asian women like myself who've just come from India and need to keep to our own image and lifestyle".

Whilst there were indications of different personal ambitions between the Hindu and Muslim interviewees, the difficulties they faced in England reflected a shared desire to retain their culture, its religious beliefs and values alongside a desire to be part of English society. Sometimes an increasing self awareness, derived from their developing Asian world, matched neither the perceptions of English society, nor the traditions of in-laws who settled here a generation earlier.

Summary

For different reasons, then, each group was functioning in a culture of accumulated experiences and belief systems which confirmed different expectations, rather than justified their exclusion, from today's higher education climate. The concept of educational value and universities depended, for some, on defined boundaries. Others developed new concepts of education in relation to how they felt the experience valued them as people.

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USING LIFELINES:
AN EVALUATION OF LONG TERM EFFECTS OF EXPERIENCES CONTRIBUTING TO ENVIRONMENTAL AWARENESS

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Introduction

Most research on evaluating environmental interpretation techniques has involved measuring the effect of one display, often over a short period using pre- and post-tests. However, more important for environmental educators is to know what experiences are most influential on changing people's attitudes in the long term, so that we might target educational activities more effectively. We investigated the use of lifelines to generate self-selected significant experiences that had contributed to the environmental awareness of those taking part in the study. We then considered the possibilities of a more in-depth analysis from discussion using a focus group technique (Hedges,1985;Burgess et all 1988).

Lifelines are used extensively in counselling and education (Richardson, 1979; Sinclair et all.,1979) to focus on particular aspects of people's lives and give them insights into the choices they have made. The information may highlight specific experiences or general patterns and is used as a basis for discussion, reflection or more dynamic counselling. There is no agreed format and information may be represented on one or several parallel lines (see Fig.1). Participants may add more as they discuss their lifelines with others, however the important characteristic of a lifeline is that it reveals what the participant considers significant.

As far as we are aware, the specific technique described has not been used in evaluating the long-term effect of environmental experiences, although the use of life histories is not a new approach. By using a research technique that recognises the "cultural embeddedness" of environmental experiences (Burgess et all,1988), significant memories are unlocked and recorded. creating the lifelines and discussing them with other people allows the participant to explore experiences both at a private level and in a familiar social context. It is, after all, usually in dialogue with others that we reminisce and one person's experience will set off trains of thought in the other, forming chains of interpersonal communication - what Foulkes (1975) refers to as the "free floating" that occurs when people interact in a group.

As well as providing a list of self-selected significant experiences the analysis of lifelines provides a measurement of the degree to which that experience has influenced attitudes. The patterns that emerge highlight similarities and differences, and can also yield information on a variety of issues (e.g.gender). These factors can be subjected to a numerical analysis and be used as a starting point for further in-depth research in a more formal group setting.

Method

In a pilot study, environmental education professionals attending a course at Birkbeck College were asked to spend approximately ten minutes recording experiences that they felt were significant in shaping their attitudes and feelings about the environment. We asked them to start from childhood and represent the information in linear form. The lifelines were anonymous and confidential.

From these initial lifelines, in which experiences were self-selected, we were able to compile a list of factors that might remind people of further experiences not already included on their own line. We gave this to the group and asked them to add anything else significant. In order to collect sufficient data and to widen the scope of the study, a similar procedure was followed with members of the Countryside Management course, giving a total of 34 lifelines.

The results were analysed and allocated to categories drawn from the lifelines themselves. Expert experience was counted even if it occurred more than once. We also recorded use of emotive language, such as superlatives. Where a participant mentioned negative experiences, for instance intense dislike of a teacher, this information was included without prejudicing the numerical count (see Appendix I).

We were able to collect data by examining the language used. The flexibility of the lifeline allowed participants to express themselves in what they felt to be the most appropriate way. The information found on the lifelines is similar to that referred to by Glen (1994), writing of the "once only" group:

> "It allows consumers to express their views in their own language and to determine the levels of emphasis they themselves wish to lend to areas under discussion, hence indicating the importance with which they regard it."

Although there had been both the opportunity, and active encouragement, to discuss during the lifeline exercise, we felt a more formal group discussion would give us a deeper understanding of the aspects that made up the experience. We also wanted to look at the possible ways that the information on the lifelines could be used for further data collection. Since field trips had been a significant experience for over half the group sampled, particularly women (see Appendix III), we asked two members of the Environmental Education course to discuss what had been important for them about field trips. This experiment, together with out reading of similar research projects (Burgess et al. 1988, Walker 1985, Hedges 1985) suggests that small group discussion is a method that could be used as a sequel to the lifeline evaluation.

Results

One of the major themes that emerged from the Greenwich data (Burgess et al.,1988) was

> "the importance of early contact with nature and with the physical environment...[which] ties in directly with the memories of....[the participants'] childhood experiences and with their universal concern and anxiety about the safety of their own children in local open spaces".

This connection between past experience and present feelings, often expressed in action, also emerged from the lifeline data. For example, experience of a walk, outing or holiday was mentioned most often on the lifelines, the majority occurring in the first twenty years of life. Twenty-seven out of thirty-four participants felt these experiences were important. Further along their lifelines interest was expressed in joining a conservation organisation or volunteering for conservation work: twenty-two out of twenty-seven recorded either or both as significant.

Very early experiences of the natural world were seen by many as important in determining their direction in life. Both participants and the analysis distinguished between

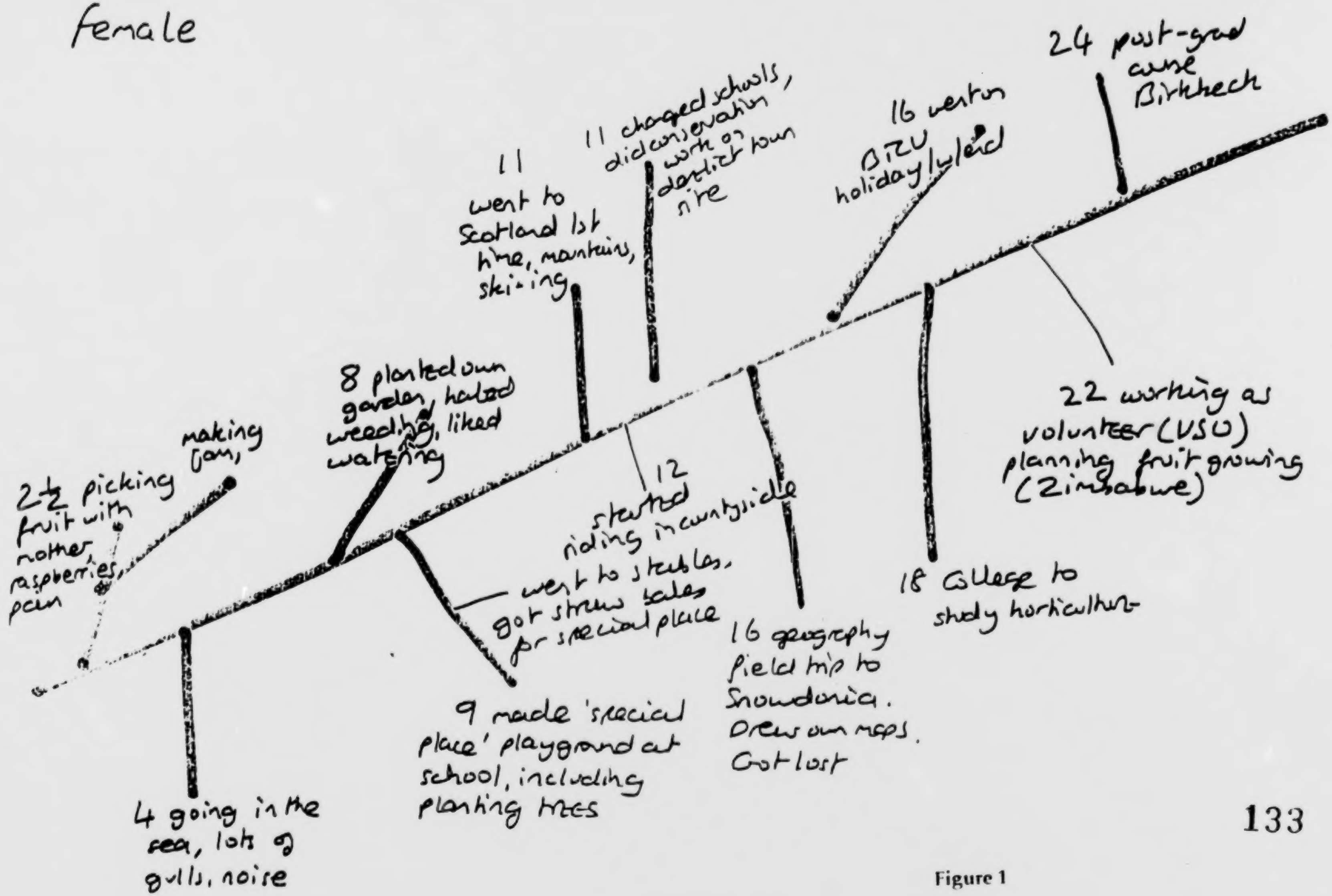
female
2½ picking fruit with mother, raspberries, pain
making jam,
4 going in the sea, lots of gulls, noise
8 planted own garden, hated weeding, liked watering
9 made 'special place' playground at school, including planting trees
11 went to Scotland 1st time, mountains, ski-ing
11 changed schools, did conservation work on derelict town site
12 started riding in countryside
went to stables, got straw bales for special place
16 geography field trip to Snowdonia. Drew own maps. Got lost
16 went on BTCV holiday/w/end
18 College to study horticulture
22 working as volunteer (VSO) planning fruit growing (Zimbabwe)
24 post-grad course Birkbeck

Figure 1

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sensory experience and other early experience. A combined total of thirty-two put them second in importance to walks, outings and holidays.

Patterns of linked factors emerged. Out of the fourteen participants who referred to gardens or allotments, six were mentioned in connection with grandparents. Later, experiences at school commonly featured an important teaching or an outing or field trip. These two were linked, the field trips being associated with a teacher, peer group or awareness of the environment. The focus group discussion was useful in extending understanding of this linkage: the coincidence of developments in forming relationships with strong experience of the natural world emerging as particularly important.

Our analysis included emotive language ("e"column, Appendix II) and negative experiences ("n" column). Here, too, patterns arose with negative experiences often being followed by equivalent positive ones. Lifelines reflected a growing awareness of personal preferences and changes made in lifestyle to accommodate them.

The data were sorted according to the number of times each factor was mentioned on a lifeline (see Appendix II). The gender weighting of 22 men and 12 women, taking part in the study affects overall ratings. it underlines the importance of taking into account gender similarities and differences, highlighted in Appendix III where averages have been used. Statistical analysis in fact suggests that women have significantly higher frequencies (chi-square test, 2-tail, $p<0.05$) of walks and holidays, sense of place, grandparents and books, whereas men have significantly higher frequencies of hobbies and farm experiences.

The data indicate that the most frequent influences on environmental commitment were informal opportunities to experience the environment (32%), then personal experiences (22%), following by formal education, family and friends, and conservation organisations (each 10-12%), and finally the media (7%).

Discussion

Examining the research in the context of an existing body of work enables the advantages and disadvantages of different types of data presentation to be illustrated.

The authors of the Greenwich study (Burgess et al 1988) present data as a descriptive interpretation. "Quantitative analyses," they point out, "are not suitable media for discovering feelings and meanings for environment." Lifelines provide qualitative data and each one can be analysed separately. However, in dealing with a larger number, a quantitative analysis is also appropriate. Further work to validate conclusions could be done, for example, using a focus-group discussion as mentioned above.

Crompton and Sellar (1981) examine a number of American research projects which set out to clarify the psychological, social and educational effects of outdoor projects.

> "..outdoor education experiences facilitate positive affective development. The cumulative reported findings suggest that students' self-concept is enhanced; peer socialisation and racial integration are facilitated; and teacher-student relationships are improved."

They acknowledge, however, that their conclusions are tentative because of the poor design of some of their projects:. Since the researchers asked the question they, rather than participants, decided what was significant. Lifelines allow more flexibility as there are no "answers", right or wrong. Self-selected memories can reflect self-concept.

The time and format of the lifelines are also relatively unstructured. This allowed participants in the study to feel in control of the process. it is important that they were given both unprompted time and a chance to add further details to their lifeline after discussion or seeing a list of other people's experiences. In our sample some people did not add much, if anything, to their lifelines. Others found that discussion revealed many related memories that they felt were significant.

In analysing the data it is important that everything is included. Participants select the factors they feel are significant which means that in some cases there will be several entries of the same factor. This enables the degree to which that experience was thought to have influenced the participants to be measured. In addition, the language used gives an indication of the importance of that factor.

Kaplan and Kaplan (1989) in comparative work involving environmental professional and random groups, relating to perception and categorisation of the environment itself highlight another very important point. Significant differences were found in the outlook and perceptions of professionals such as foresters, and those of other interest groups or the public:

> "In terms of perception... professionals would be likely to categorise the environment in terms of the salient categories of their profession. In other words, the process of training in the respective specialty is intimately involved with learning to see the environment in a particular way."

This finding seems to validate an approach which emphasises the importance of self-selection and indicates the potential for further, comparative, work involving lifelines with groups other than environmental professionals.

The categories used in analysis were drawn from the lifelines themselves, however decisions have to be made about how to group them. Future work on lifelines could make use of major categories and sub-categories, for example, "significant adult" could be sub-divided and include "teacher", "parent", "friend" to provide more detailed information. Each sample will be different and categories need flexibility to prevent omissions, or forcing material into pre-set categories.

Conclusion

Analysis of lifelines data could be significant in evaluating the long-term effects of environmental experiences. Since environmental education is above all about developing attitudes, this has implications for its practice. Moreover lifelines may well be of use to researchers in other areas, especially those where attitudes are important. They are a neat form of focused life history which are amenable to both qualitative and quantitative analysis.

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APPENDIX I

Participant's number code	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10	11	12	13	14	15	16	17	18	19	20	21	22	101	102	103	104	105	106	107	108	109	110	111	112
Walks/Outings/holidays	1			1		1	1	1	1	1		1	1	1	1	1		4		3	2		2	2	3	1	2	3	2	4	4	4	2	2
Organisations		2		3	1	1	1		1	1		2	1	1	1			1	2	1	1		1			1				3		1	1	1
Career path	1	2	1	1	1	1	2	1	1	1					2		2	1	1								1	2	1		1	2		1
Environmental awareness	1							1	1	1					1	1	2		1		3		6					1		1	2	1	2	
Sense of place (home)							2		1		1			1	1				1			1	3	1				2	1		3	5	1	
Outdoor pursuits	1			1				3	1	1	1	1							2					2			2	3		2	2			1
Garden/allotment		1											2	1		1	1	2	2	2		2		1				1		2	3			2
Field trips				1	1	1								1				2	5		1						2	1		4	1	2	1	
Conservation volunteering	1	1		1				1		1					1			2		1	2	1	1			2		2		2	1	1	2	
General family	1				1		2		1	1		2		1	1	1		2					1	1	2			1	1	1	1	1		
General early experience												1	2	1		1				1	4	1						1		1	2	1		1
Farm	1		3			1	1	1	1			1		1			1		1			1	2	1										
Pets				2					1	1	1	1		1		1	1	1						1		1	1		1		1			1
Early sensory experience					2							1	2						1				3					1	1		1	1		2
Further education		1	1	1			1												1	1					1			1			1	2	2	1
Grandparents							1	1								1				1			1	1		1	1	1		2		1	1	1
Film/television					1				1	1		1					1			2	1						1			1			1	2
Toys			1		1							1	1	1				1				1		1					1	1			1	
School subject		1	1	1		1																								1	1	3	1	
Special place									1			1		1					1		4								1			1		
Books																					2							1	3		2	1		
Teacher		1		1														1							1			2				1		1
Hobby						1									1		2	1			2	1												
Sense of awe											1										2		1								1	1		
Sport					1					1		1		1			1							1										
Important adult relationship								1			1				2																	1		
Travel							1	1			1												1											
Peer group (teenage)	1							1																								1		
Sharing experience																1															1		1	
Creative responses/activities																												1				1		
Important adult	1																																	
Participant's gender	M	M	M	M	M	M	M	M	M	M	M	M	M	M	M	M	M	M	M	M	M	M	F	F	F	F	F	F	F	F	F	F	F	F

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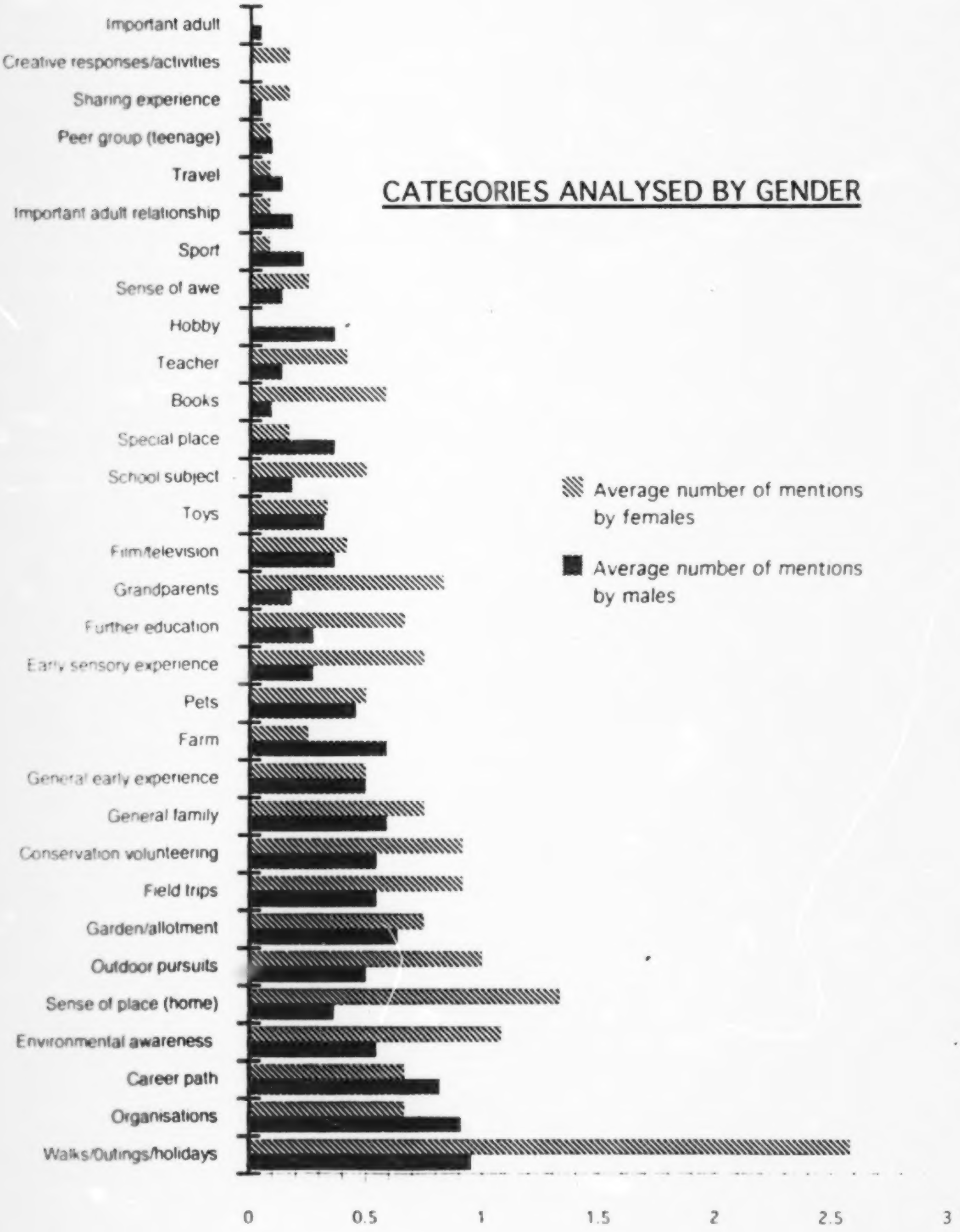
APPENDIX II

	Total(M)	M.Av	Total (F)	F.Av	F-M	Total	n	e
Walks/Outings/holidays	21	0.95	31	2.58	1.63	52	2	2
Organisations	20	0.91	8	0.67	-0.2	28	2	
Career path	18	0.82	8	0.67	-0.2	26	6	
Environmental awareness	12	0.55	13	1.08	0.54	25	1	3
Sense of place (home)	8	0.36	16	1.33	0.97	24		2
Outdoor pursuits	11	0.5	12	1	0.5	23	3	
Garden/allotment	14	0.64	9	0.75	0.11	23		
Field trips	12	0.55	11	0.92	0.37	23	1	2
Conservation volunteering	12	0.55	11	0.92	0.37	23		
General family	13	0.59	9	0.75	0.16	22	3	
General early experience	11	0.5	6	0.5	0	17		
Farm	13	0.59	3	0.25	-0.3	16		
Pets	10	0.45	6	0.5	0.05	16		
Early sensory experience	6	0.27	9	0.75	0.48	15	1	1
Further education	6	0.27	8	0.67	0.39	14	1	
Grandparents	4	0.18	10	0.83	0.65	14		
Film/television	8	0.36	5	0.42	0.05	13		
Toys	7	0.32	4	0.33	0.02	11		
School subject	4	0.18	6	0.5	0.32	10	4	1
Special place	8	0.36	2	0.17	-0.2	10		
Books	2	0.09	7	0.58	0.49	9		
Teacher	3	0.14	5	0.42	0.28	8	2	
Hobby	8	0.36	0	0	-0.4	8		
Sense of awe	3	0.14	3	0.25	0.11	6		2
Sport	5	0.23	1	0.08	-0.1	6		
Important adult relationship	4	0.18	1	0.08	-0.1	5	1	1
Travel	3	0.14	1	0.08	-0.1	4		1
Peer group (teenage)	2	0.09	1	0.08	0	3		
Sharing experience	1	0.05	2	0.17	0.12	3		
Creative responses/activities	0	0	2	0.17	0.17	2		
Important adult	1	0.05	0	0	0	1	2	1

Legend : M = male F = female Av = average

n = negative mentions e = use of emotive language

APPENDIX III



CATEGORIES ANALYSED BY GENDER

LIFE HISTORY AND MOTIVATION FOR ADULT EDUCATION

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Introduction:

The research project described below forms part of the Swiss National Research Programm 33 (NFP 33). This program is dedicated to the "Efficiency of our School Systems" and started in 1993. 28 research teams of all parts of Switzerland are conducting projects on a wide range of topics. Our project relates personal educational goals of adults to their educational biography and will provide information about their motivation and their problems. It is realised in collaboration between the Cantons of Zurich and Bern and the University of Geneva (Pierre Dominicé).

To explain the project it is necessary to inform briefly about the Swiss school system. The curriculum for elementary and secondary schools is in the decision making power of each individual canton. After six years of primary school, the children in the canton of Zurich are divided into three or four different school sections according to their intellectual abilities. The different levels allow for different opportunities of professional training and further education.

Compulsory education for all children lasts 9 years. After grade 9 most young people go into vocational education and training. Vocational training is provided mainly by apprenticeships supported by schooling. About 18 % of the students continue to visit a full time school after they have completed their compulsory education. Among the older generation a considerable number left school at the age of 15 or 16 without any further education. Nowadays the great majority of youngsters continue their education either in a full time school or in vocational training. Special programs for adults should enable persons with little or no education to fill the gap and improve their mobility.

Participation in Adult Education

The significance of adult and recurrent education in our time is widely acknowledged. Nevertheless, it can be observed that participation in learning activities is low in certain groups of adults. For Switzerland, representative telephone interviews with 6'300 persons in 1993 show great differences in participation according to age, sex and previous schooling[1]. Many low qualified people do not participate in programs specially designed for them. In Switzerland as in many other countries, certain groups are "resistent" against programs for higher education or qualification. The problem of functional illiteracy e.g. exists in Switzerland as in all countries, but there are only estimates concerning the number of persons involved and their needs. Adults with a good or excellent education show a much higher motivation for further learning activities than persons with only a basic or an interrupted school education. The obstacles to the non-participants can be divided in situational, institutional and psychological ones. V. McGivney (1990)[2] argues that the psychological factors like previous learning experiences, self concept, expectations, attitudes towards schools, teachers and learning, are the most important.

Adult education is therefore rather a continuation of formal schooling than a compensation. S. Courtney (1992)[3] summarizes: "Men and woman pursue adult education because they have been successful, so far, rather than want to be successful." Formal adult education remains the domain of the younger adult with better levels of prior schooling and income. Nevertheless, there are adults participating in courses for basic education, i.e. learning to read and to write, compensating for their educational deficits.

Research Design

The central question of our research is what motivates adults to participate in formal education and others to avoid all contact with learning environments, formal or informal. Our team in Zurich and Bern consists of 5 social scientists working part-time on this research. It will compare the life histories of "participants" and non-participants. In the Cantons of Zurich and Bern, 120 interviews with different groups of adults will be conducted. One group will consist of persons participating in programs to improve their basic education on various levels (reading and writing, general education, vocational training for adults, access to university programmes), the other group will consist of persons refusing to participate. The non-participants are found through work agencies and managers of firms and companies who employ a considerable percentage of unskilled workers. Participation in the interviews is voluntary, this group will be paid for the interviews.

The biographical interviews in both groups will concentrate on family background and attitudes, school history, attitudes toward education, learning and teachers, planned careers, problems, ruptures and failures and present situation.

Interpretations

The research team will analyze the significance of the school career or single events for the life history, determine the factors which influence the motivation to participate in adult education and the obstacles that prevent others improving their education. We shall compare the life histories of adults with negative attitudes towards learning and others who participate in programs compensating for deficits in basic education. An exchange of data with the group of Pierre Dominicé in Geneva is planned.

The project was accepted in October 1993 and started with methodological and theoretical work. The pretest-interviews were conducted in May and June 1994, the research interviews will be carried out between August 1994 and July 1995. First results are planned for 1995. The final report is due in July 1996.

The results will be used for

- interpretation of statistical data of educational biographies
- information about the efficiency of our school systems
- teacher training
- planning programs of adult education
- training programs for adult educators.

First results show the importance of family background and teacher attitudes. Adults with a history of school failure have parents, who were poorly educated themselves and were not interested in a good formal education for their children. Our interview-partners regretted that they had teachers who accepted their family background and did not encourage them to continue school. It will be interesting to see how the adults were motivated to compensate their deficits.

Notes

1. Bundesamt fur Statistik "Weiterbildung in der Schweiz" Erste Resultate des Mikrozensus Weiterbildung 1993.

2. McGivney Veronica "Access to Education for Non-participant Adults" Leicester, 1990.

3. Courtney Sean "Why Adults Learn; Towards a theory of Participation in Adult Education" London, 1992.

QUILTING A LIFE HISTORY

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"*...My whole life is in that quilt... I tremble sometimes when I remember what that quilt knows about me.*" (Ohio woman, 1890's, in Sagaria, 1989).

Quilts and other textile images - spinning, weaving, tapestry - are common in women's writing about their lives. Use of the quilt as a metaphor offers the potential to illuminate a range of life situations. Quilters themselves may represent in their work many aspects of the life of the maker, or a crucial event (such as the 'Underground Railroad' quilt design representing escape from slavery). My research (for the degree of PhD. at the University of Kent) examines the 'career' development of women who work, or who have worked, as part-time hourly-paid tutors in continuing education. I use the metaphor of a quilt (as proposed by Mary Ann Sagaria, 1989, writing for employment counsellors) to illustrate the complexity of women's working lives.

In using this metaphor, my primary focus is on adult women's careers and on related activities which have affected or supplemented their paid work or have been carried out at the same time: for example, voluntary work, political activity, study and creative work (as writers, artists, craftswomen) and responsibilities as carers. I do not examine personal accounts relating to childhood or adolescence, unless offered within a questionnaire response as part of an explanation of adult events, commitments or attitudes. Furthermore, my research focuses on women whose experience includes one specific part-time occupation, rather than on adults generally or on a wide range of occupations. I hope, however, that the workshop offered will be of interest to anyone who would like to consider their own career development or life history, or that of others, in the light of this metaphor.

My research to date is based on questionnaire responses from women who are current or former part-time hourly paid tutors in adult and continuing education: in universities, in colleges, in adult education services or in the voluntary sector. Question-naires were circulated to women on the tutor mailing lists of a range of institutions; this paper draws on information from the first 80 respondents.

The questionnaire sought information about a range of issues related to employment and career patterns. Respondents were asked to provide information about their career/work histories; their current employment, including freelance work and employment other than as tutor; their work, past or present, as tutors, including subjects taught or other work carried out under the same pay and conditions of service (development work, special projects, centre management and so forth); current responsibilities and interests including voluntary work, study, paid or unpaid activities such as art or writing; and current or past responsibilities as carer. Further questions were deliberately open-ended, to facilitate reflection and elicit the respondent's own thoughts and opinions on her working life. Respondents were asked about the impact of carer roles on their work; issues concerning entry to, and departure from, work as a tutor; the main satisfactions and difficulties in that work that they had experienced, and future plans. Respondents were also asked about a range of variables (including class, ethnicity and disablement) that have been found to affect career development[1], with a clear option to comment on these or not as they chose.

It became clear, in answers to questions on these variables, that respondents came from a wide range of backgrounds and personal circumstances. Respondents provided a wealth of data, writing in some cases at considerable length about their experiences. 15% of respondents chose to indicate that they were of working class origin, and 10% specified that they were of Black or Asian descent. Some 17% felt that disablement or ill health had affected their work or careers. Most had worked for local authority-funded adult education services or university continuing education programmes in London and Kent, and had worked for more than one employer in this field. 74% of respondents were graduates and 53% had some form of postgraduate qualification; of these, the respondents with university teaching tended to have Masters degrees, while those who had not taught in a university were more likely to have post-graduate diplomas, predominantly Diplomas in Education or Social Work. The vast majority of respondents taught, or used to teach, subjects in Adult Basic Education, Humanities, Social Sciences, and Arts or Crafts. 74% of respondents were current tutors, and of these, 53% also held other posts, mainly in education and training. Of the 21 former tutors, 10 (49%) were working in education and training, and 6 (29%) in social services or counselling.

84% of respondents had had carer responsibilities at some point, with several caring for three generations over many years; 36% said that they had started working as part-time tutors after having children. For some, this work had led to further opportunities:

> *"At the time my eldest child was a baby and I started with two evening classes - fitted in with child-care commitments ... [I am now] Head of Section ... studying Open University Diploma.[2]"*

Some women expressed considerable frustration that their lives were, or had been, constrained by the illness or the demands of others:

> *"Married with children until 1981 where I was expected to know my place (by the kitchen sink) ... I graduated at 51 and have been looking for work to satisfy me ever since."*

Some women worked part-time, or a cumulation of hours and posts amounting to full-time, and were also involved in voluntary work, in part-time study including research projects, or in activities (paid or unpaid) as writers, artists or craftswomen:

> "ESOL [English for Speakers of Other Languages] tutor for various groups ... personal tutor and development work ... solidarity work for Human Rights Campaigns (voluntary); studying for City and Guilds qualification in adult education."

The lives of these 80 part-time workers were frequently very complex, involving a skilled manoeuvring of time and resources:

> "Freelance work, eg. editing and lexicography, I try to fit in at evenings or weekends when my partner does the child-care ... [I currently do] 8 hours per week college teaching ... 7 hours per week freelance editing ... 2-4 hours per week commitment as a parent to a community nursery and as chair of parent-run committee ..."

Recent research on women's career development shows that women's careers are different from those of men: factors such as gendered perceptions of occupation, women's greater role in parenting, and workplace discrimination contribute to the construction of complex career patterns.[3] How can the metaphor of a quilt be used to add to our understanding of the career patterns of women part-time tutors? It became clear, reading the questionnaires, that traditional career images (ladders, for example) did not work as a representation of these careers, which moved up, down and sideways; switched direction;

stopped, and started from a completely different point. A number of respondents (who were, nevertheless, generous in the detail of their responses) commented that they did not regard themselves as having a career, or that their career had been odd, peculiar - "*a funny sort of career.*" Trends began to emerge: a juggling of carer roles with other work, a breadth of paid and unpaid activity, the development of a broader portfolio of classes as tutors gained in confidence and knowledge, and a richness of experience to offer. The image of a quilt lends itself to diversity; used as a metaphor, it may, as Sagaria argues, be a way of validating and recognising the extent of a woman's working experience, drawing on elements of her life that a traditional representation omits or ignores: "Like quilts, many women's careers are traditional in appearance, but a closer examination reveals an elegant unfolding and discovery of self."

Quilt-making has been part of women's work for centuries, in many parts of the world. Research into the quilting tradition has been especially predominant in the USA, with substantial reference to the social contexts of quilting. Bettina Aptheker, in her *Tapestries of life* (1989), argues that "the quilts, the stories, the gardens, the poems, the letters, the recipes, the rituals are examples of women's ways of knowing ... a focus on the practical, an integration of the abstract and the practical, a continual analysis and reworking of context, which comes out of the particularity of women's labours and consciousness." She regards the quilt as "a metaphor for the way in which we as women might piece the diversity of our experiences into meaningful and useful patterns. "The concept is far from new; Aptheker quotes a 19th century Massachusetts diarist who described quilts as "the hieroglyphics of women's lives."

I have tried to take the quilt metaphor a step further in creating visual representations of womens' career patterns in a quilt image. Using a simple quilt template as a computerised worksheet, key elements of career activity, and of other key events or aspects of a woman's working life, can be selectively overlaid onto the quilt. These can be grouped to focus around specific themes, such as education, or placed at random. Colour coding these groups is also feasible. However, this requires the viewer to make certain connections and therefore miss others. If, for example, all educational experience is represented in green, a key connection (such as a link between part-time study and part-time caring) may be visually weakened.[4] I chose to work in colour but without coding, grouping the career overlay items very loosely in a variety of ways. The result is a colourful quilt image, on the one hand no longer metaphor but fact, on the other hand a metaphor visually and verbally conjoined.

Visual metaphors illustrating life histories are being explored by others; for example, Tom Schuller's work on images of the life course (1994). The quilt is one of a variety of possible metaphors that enrich our understanding of the complexity of life history and of career development. The quilt metaphor, and its use as an exploratory artefact, offers ways of seeing a career or life history, that are non-linear. Chronology can be overridden; a single decision can be highlighted and linked to resulting patterns of events; connections can be made in various ways according to the quilt shapes and layout. The layout and design will vary, of course, if one creates one's own 'quilt' or attempts to construct that of someone else. Privacy can be retained by using quilt pieces without adding a text (the message then being 'visible' only to the quilt-maker) or by regarding the back of the quilt as the background, the on-going life (sub-text?) on which the top of the quilt, the aspects of one's life known to others, is manifested. The next stage of my research will be to explore the creation of 'quilts' with respondents, testing use of the metaphor and discussing career patterns and development as experienced by groups of women tutors and ex-tutors.

The workshop linked to this paper will offer the opportunity to construct our own career or life history 'quilts' using paper templates and quilt pieces. I hope through the workshop to test the metaphor in action in a way that provides an opportunity for participants to reflect on the 'shaping' of their own life histories.

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1. See, for example, work by Susan Boardman et al on class and ethnicity in relation to women's careers (1987), and Cas Walker's account of the experiences of Black women in educational management (1993).

2. Quotations from respondents have been edited to ensure confidentiality.

3. See, for example, work by Barbara Gutek and Laurie Harwood (1987).

4. Thanks are due to Pam Cowan for an illuminating discussion on the issue of colour coding.

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ADULT LEARNING IN A TIME OF TRANSITION: EXPERIENCES IN EAST GERMANY

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The dramatic and startling events which took place in Germany during 1989 - the Wende (change) - were hard to understand for outsiders. Media reporters and academic observers were quick to review the situation, often interviewing Germans from both sides of the wall, drawing initial conclusions in their attempts to analyse, explain, justify and interpret those events to the world outside Germany (Dennis 1993, Farr 1991, Ignatieff 1993, Keithly 1992, Kolinsky 1993, Philipsen 1993 and others).

The new Bundeslander, as the former German Democratic Republic is commonly described, has now been (re)unified with the old Bundeslander for almost five years. After the initial euphoria, their citizens have been obliged to readjust to a very different way of life. Along with the oppression and frustrations of the old regime, jobs for all, free or low cost childcare, free medical care and free education at every level are things of the past. Adult education was widely accessible to East Germans before the Wende. Many people took advantage of the courses available from the Volkshochschule (literally people's high school) and the universities, including study at a distance. What is the role of adult education now? How do the opportunities available compare with what used to be available, and what use do people make of them?

The method

This first set of interviews with East Germans is intended as a pilot phase, to test out the chosen technique and the questionnaire and to assess the feasibility of the project as a whole.

Since it was felt to be important that the decisions people made about their learning should be seen in context, it was decided to use a life course analysis approach to the discussion of the current role of adult education in the new Bundeslander. The technique used was the Interview Document originally used by Johnson et al (1981) and developed by Farnes (1994). The Document drafted for this project included open-ended starter questions covering:

- childhood and early life
- school, further, higher and adult education
- working life
- domestic circumstances
- use of free time including religious and political affiliations
- life before and after the Wende, with particular reference to the update and use of educational opportunities
- the high and low points of their lives to date
- hopes and fears for the future.

These open-ended questions thus covered the main areas of the interviewees' life histories. They were followed by topic list items expressed as questions, which were aimed at eliciting further information on the main events, and details of the interviewees' lives. When the topic questions had been covered, the interviewer returned to the earlier sections to check that there were no major omissions. This technique encouraged interviewees to tell their life stories, with a particular emphasis on adult education, rather than giving brief answers to specific questions. Each interview was recorded and the interviewer took detailed notes. These notes and recordings were later translated from German into English and summarised. The interviews were carried out over a week at the end of April 1994.

The interviewees

A pilot sample of seven people was selected, based on the city of Leipzig in Sachsen. All had a close interest in adult education as users or providers, or both. Their years of birth ranged from 1925 to 1969; all had been born within an eighty mile radius of Leipzig and their families originated from there (apart from the parents of one interviewee who were born in West Africa). All (with the exception of war service and a 2 year visit to Africa) had spent their lives in or near Leipzig.

Hanni was born in 1969 of West African parents, both of whom worked as lawyers. She left school at 16 with the mittlere Reife (medium grade school leaving qualification) and worked for some years as a waitress, undertaking some vocational training. She is currently studying fulltime for her Abitur (A level equivalent) with a distance teaching organisation; her ambition is to go into higher education to study psychology.

Anna, born the daughter of an engineer in 1948, has recently begun a new job as deputy director of a distance teaching centre. A graduate in economics, she has had a variety of jobs including working in a bank, supervising a department of 31 bookkeepers and as a junior lecturer in a university. Before the Wende she studied a number of adult education courses.

Lotte, Hans and Käthe are all retired and are members of the Seniorenkolleg, a body which resembles and has close links with the Universite du troisieme age in France and the University of the Third Age in the United Kingdom.

Lotte was born in 1929, the only child of a master roofer with his own business. Like Hanni, she left school with the mittlere Reife, and undertook vocational training in the postwar years which enabled her to work first at the Leipzig Fair offices, then as an assistant to her husband in his pharmacy. Widowed at a very early age, she went back to work and in 1972 was delighted to get a place on a sandwich course set up especially for women, the so-called Frauensonderstudium, which enabled her to qualify as a civil engineer and work in this area till her retirement.

Hans (born 1927) was the son of a factory worker and left school at 16 to train to be an instructor with the navy. Drafted into the Kriegsmarine, he spent the last year of the 1939-45 war on the Eastern front and 1945-49 in a prisoner of war camp in Russia. His experiences there and as a seventeen-year old in the war have left deep emotional scars. After a spell as a building labourer, he went back into education to get his Abitur and to attend the Martin Luther University at Halle. His working life was spent as a lecturer in sports physiology and training Olympic athletes. He has written part of a textbook in his chosen subject area and works hard to keep up to date with the specialist literature. He still hopes to collaborate with colleagues in some project which will enable them to pass on their knowledge to others.

Käthe, born in 1925, was the daughter of a captain in the police, formerly an officer in the 1914-18 war. She is still pre-occupied by memories of her life before the war, in a safe, bourgeois family, in contrast with the terrors and uncertainties of the war years spent in a cellar in Leipzig and the post war years devastated by the death of her father in 1945 and the illness of her mother. Handicapped by her refusal to engage in political activity, her working life was mainly spent working in a large chemical company in Leipzig. She makes valiant efforts to work on her own to improve the English she first learnt as a girl at her village school.

Trudi, born 1953, was exceptional in the pre-1989 DDR in that she and her family spent 2 years in the Zambia on her husband's secondment there during the early eighties. The daughter of village school teachers, she studied for five years at the University of Potsdam to achieve her diploma in political science. After a variety of high level jobs she is now office manager and general dogsbody at a company franchised to teach foreign languages. In what spare time she has she studies frantically on a distance learning course to gain a qualification as a psychological adviser so as to give her a fall back position in case her current job should fail.

Wolfgang (born 1956) is Trudi's boss. Both his parents worked - his mother as an official in a finance department, his father first as a technical draughtsman, then as teacher of Russian and finally as a flying instructor. His study of languages at the University of Halle has taken him up to PhD level. His jobs till now have been mainly as a translator/interpreter. Wolfgang is finding it hard to cope with the demands of a working life in a new commercial environment. His dream is to retire to his family home in Halle and immerse himself in reading literature, creative writing and a study of environmental issues.

Preliminary conclusions

While it is impossible to construct major hypotheses on the basis of a sample as small as this, a preliminary analysis of these interviews had produced a number of interesting, and by no means predictable outcomes.

Childhood

Without exception, whatever their age all seven interviewees looked back to their childhood as a time of safety and security. All recall happy, healthy years: four lived in villages, three in large cities. All attended local schools, apart from Anna, who chose to go away to an intensive, academic boarding school at fifteen against the wishes of her parents.

Formal education

Three out of the seven followed what might be termed a conventional path from school into higher education. Two achieved qualifications relatively late in life; one is currently engaged in study for her Abitur eight years after leaving school and one left formal education at 16.

Domestic circumstances

Only Käthe lives alone (her only child lives in Berlin, and much as she loves her, Käthe prefers to keep some distance between them). Hanni, who lives with her student boyfriend, and Anna, married to a freelance interior designer, are both childless. Lotte and Hans both have adult children and live with 'life companions'. Wolfgang and Trudi are both married with two children each; they live with their spouses. All interviewees live in rented flats in Leipzig, apart from Wolfgang who said that he is lucky enough to have an inherited house in Halle, to which he is very attached.

Free time

Hanni, Anna and Trudi felt that their work/study took up so much time that they had none left over for hobbies. Hanni and Trudi do both belong to clubs, however: Hanni to an informal Black German group she helped to found, and Trudi to a German African Society which meets regularly once a month. The pensioners, Lotte, Hans and Käthe, enjoy a wide range of hobbies, especially travel; they all read voraciously, swim and pursue a healthy lifestyle as far as they can. Wolfgang cited a wide range of free time activities, including growing bonsai trees, jogging and being a member of a choir. None of those interviewed do voluntary work - two of them cited the community work compulsory under the DDR as one good reason why they don't do it nowadays. Hanni, Lotte, Hans and Käthe had all been confirmed and given a religious upbringing, though are not regular church goers; the others described themselves as atheists. None of this group was currently a member of a political organisation or trade union. Hanni and Käthe had always refused to join, and felt that this had hindered them professionally. Anna, Hans, Wolfgang and Trudi had been members of political organisations as required of them in the past.

Before and after the Wende

Almost all those interviewed felt that there had indubitably been many opportunities for adult education and self advancement under the old regime, the majority of them free, or nearly free. Opinion was divided as to the **quality** of those opportunities, especially when compared with the admittedly vastly more expensive and flexible range of courses available now. The pre-1989 courses were marked by ideological bias and were tailored to the needs of the majority rather than the individual; the range of subjects covered was relatively narrow. It was also suggested that entry to them depended on proof of political commitment. As to the present day, most interviewees were alive to the irony of a situation where you normally have to work to be able to afford courses and then don't have the time to take the maximum advantage of them. Those with the time for the courses cannot generally afford them.

Asked about more general differences in life before and now, the interviewees produced a wide range of responses. Trudi, in fact, pointed out that the kind of response you will get to this question is of necessity going to be determined by who you ask and what's happening in their lives at this moment. She identified as a major problem nowadays bureaucracy and the complexity of the new regulations governing such matters as pension rights, rent control and citizen responsibilities. Hans had similar concerns: he has devoted much time to a study of the law relating to rents, since he was shortly to appear before a rent tribunal. People from the new Bundesländer are simply not accustomed to researching and implementing their rights as citizens. Käthe said that she could never come to terms with the division of Germany - it had always seemed deeply unnatural to her. So, for her, reunification is what she has always desired more than anything else. This contrasts with Wolfgang's reaction - he felt that his whole world had come to an end when the wall came down. The opportunity to travel was seen by the three pensioners as the best aspect of the change of regime. All three also deplored the growth of crime, which has affected them personally to some degree. Hans explained that he felt that, pre-1989, the low level of crime was controlled not by the police or the authorities, but from the people themselves; he cited the influences of the Konfliktkommissionen groups in companies, who were effective in identifying potential problems and dealing with them informally. This group of interviewees barely touched on changes such as the vastly expanded choice of goods in shops and availability of credit to buy them. It seems possible that East Germans have fast become accustomed to such matters.

Highs

Hanni, Anna, Käthe and Trudi all mentioned incidents or phases from their personal, domestic lives such as the birth of babies or the successes of adult children. Lotte highlighted her success on the women's sandwich course, where she was the oldest to study and graduate. Hans felt very happy that he had been permitted to study, despite being from 'a certain level of society' and that he had gained promotion in his work. Käthe looked back to reunification in 1989, and also rewarding holidays and experiences with her daughter. Trudi and Wolfgang recalled the completion of their studies and Wolfgang looked back to his first trip to the West, when he visited three universities in the United Kingdom in connection with his work.

Lows

Bereavement was mentioned by two interviewees. Trudi and Wolfgang mentioned the Wende, Trudi because of the uncertainties involved and Wolfgang because it marked the end of the DDR and disillusion with respected leaders. Hanni mentioned a period of problems with her identity when she found it hard to reconcile her African and German selves. Hans regretted the breakup of his marriage and family.

The future

Despite some concerns about employment, Hanni, Anna, Käthe and Hans all felt positive about the future and their lives. Trudi felt confident that many of the current problems will have disappeared in another five years' time, though she does have some concerns about the effects of Western society on her children, citing the growing drugs problem which had been non-existent before. Both she and Anna were bitter about the behaviour of West Germans, who patronise and exploit their Eastern counterparts; such behaviour is hard to cope with.

What next?

This pilot has produced interesting results which justify a larger scale project. After some minor adjustments to the Interview Document, involving changes of emphasis and the omission of some questions which proved to be unnecessary, it is intended to extend the project to include other new Bundesländer and a wider range of interviewees.

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ACCREDITING SELVES? RECOGNITION OF PRIOR LEARNING, THE SELF, AND THE ACADEMY

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A Knowledge Revolution? APL/AP(E)L theory.

Accreditation of Prior Learning is used in an increasing number of institutions across the United Kingdom . It grew out of work done in the United States in the 1970's. AP(E)L is well established in America within both adult and higher education. The work of the Learning from Experience Trust has been the impetus for the developments in Britain. Most of the models of AP(E)L in this country are based on work done by LET. These models vary to suit the needs of different institutions; including distance learning APL units, APL policies across institutions which allow claimants to claim general higher education credits, APL co-ordinators in both Further and Higher education, and APL advisory groups within institutions, all these services offer adults potential credits for learning that has taken place outside the institution. AP(E)L can be claimed within all the acronym qualifications, the NVQs, the City and Guilds, OCNs, RSA certificates and HE CATS frameworks. However most of the research work that has been done around AP(E)L has concentrated on the structures for assessment of prior learning rather than questions of the relationship between the academy, individuals and knowledge.

Self, Identity and Education

The role of the education system in constructing our individual self identities cannot be underestimated. To give one example while researching the life experiences of women who are labelled as having learning difficulties, I heard again and again within the women's narratives, perceptions of themselves as adults, being sparked by teachers or peers from their school days who told them they were stupid. Most of the women internalised this perception and still describe themselves as 'dumb' or 'not very intelligent'.[1] Thomas Scheff, building on the work of George Herbert Mead, Eving Goffman and Helen Lewis, establishes a construction of self which is based on offering the individual either esteem or shame. [2] This basic dichotomy constructs our identity in a series of complex overlaying, where we attempt to avoid being shamed and gain esteem from others. If shame is given individuals construct a negative image of themselves.

Within Education notions of correct forms of knowledge and ways of constructing that knowledge are coded to only offer esteem to certain groups who are able to recognise this discourse . Once an individual has grasped these definitions they are seen to 'progress' and 'be good at' a subject. Esteem in education is usually formalised through the process of giving qualifications. Those who gain 'other' knowledge are seen as outsiders and are shamed by not gaining qualifications. Recognition of Prior Learning has been heralded as being a way of offering 'others' recognition or esteem for learning which has taken place outside of the traditional education establishments. This process should have an impact on the construction of self identity. I was interested to investigate how much AP(E)L could be used to reverse the negative self image which many people had received through their contact with education.

What is Knowledge?

The debate around AP(E)L has centred on the ownership of the **practice** of learning, not on the ownership of the **definition** of learning or as Julia Waldman suggests the current learning climate;

> ...encompassing demonstratibility seems to sit comfortably alongside the empiricism and scientific evidence so beloved of traditional education.
> Therefore it is likely that the values which have underpinned higher education for so long have barley shifted at all.[3]

In other words, AP(E)L is not challenging the traditional knowledge base as established within the academy. It is simply trying to find methods and structures to fit the alternative ways people have used to gain that knowledge into an acceptable accreditation framework for the establishments. This does not seem to be good news for people who have gained their knowledge outside of the education system, especially if that knowledge was gained within a different social framework. Cecilia Mckelvey and Helen Peters in their book APL Equal opportunities for All? see APL as a way of enabling groups of 'others' to gain recognition. In discussion APL and speakers of other languages they point out that '....the APL process can be a valuable means of gaining credit for those whose other skills exceed their skill in the use of English."[4] Unfortunately this is focusing on the practice of learning again as they go on to point out that there is often not sufficient access to language support to enable speakers of other languages to make use of APL. The definition of knowledge in Britain is centred around a 'reasonable grasp of English.' In other words, knowledge that is constructed outside of 'our' framework cannot realistically be recognised as knowledge.

Experience is also a Social Construct.

The learning which adults have been able to gain through life is structured in inequality. It is not only the learning which takes place within educational institutions which is sexist, racist, ablist, ageist, hetrosexist and so on, but social interaction and it is social interaction which constructs our self identity.[5] In a sense this is obvious but it has quite serious implications for AP(E)L. If experience is defined within a social context, then certain groups of people are only going to have access to particular types of experiences. In our society this will mean that women, to take one example, are much more likely to have learning experiences which focus around care and caring, for children, elderly relatives, their homes and so on. If they use their experience to claim credit the areas in which they will be able to use that credit are going to be ones which will reinforce their roles as carers. It is as if the radical pedagogy of AP(E)L is a new way of supporting gender roles. This is one example, it could equally be applied to any group of people whose life chances have been limited through social inequalities.

Student and Tutor Perceptions of "other" learning.

One of the most significant features of the process of knowledge being owned, both in its practice and its definition, by the academy, is the way adults who have a wealth of experience see their own knowledge as somehow being different and other to 'real' knowledge which their tutors 'give' them. In other words the identity which we socially construct of a student is one of ignorance . I surveyed 70 students currently taking either a Certificate or a Diploma at the University of Sussex. The courses are all 'open entry' courses, no person registering need have qualifications to take the course. The students varied in age, sex and ethnicity. Some had qualifications including degrees others had no qualifications. When asked, most of the students felt that they had little or no prior learning experience which was relevant to their present course of study. However, when interviewed, most of the students found that there were a wealth of skills which they were drawing on. When I asked about the discrepancy between their responses on the questionnaire and their responses in the interview, one woman typically replied; 'I wasn't fully aware what is meant by prior learning, I thought it was only the sorts of things you got in education.' This type of response highlights the hegemony there is in our society around what knowledge is.

Tutors on the same courses were also interviewed. While most tutors felt that it is important to value the experience which adults bring to their learning, most were extremely hesitant about offering students the possibility of exemption from aspects of the their course. A typical response was; 'I think the most exciting courses are designed as a unity, so students need (and I think want) to study the course as a whole.' Another tutor said students who used AP(E)L would loose 'the critical reflection on practice which is central to the approach of the course.'

It is extremely difficult to get past a conception that knowledge is owned by educationalists. Students cannot recognise their own learning and tutors do not 'trust' that 'real' learning has taken place.

These perceptions are built on a particular scientific modernist discourse which focused knowledge within the domain of particular groups in society. It is Universalist in its approach and does not value 'other' ways of seeing. Mckelvey and Peters suggest that APL can be used to value difference but this can only be done if perceptions of what knowledge is are challenged. Even Norman Evans recognises

> By definition adults have not accumulated the knowledge and skills they are offering for assessment according to the dictates of prescribed syllabuses, although they may be asking for judgements to be made against the content of such syllabuses.[6]

The danger here then, is that Accreditation of Prior Learning becomes yet another way of defining an individual's self identity within the framework of the academy. People's selves become accredited, either offering esteem by the gaining of accreditation or shame by saying their experience is not good enough. What is rather needed is a radical re-think about what the role of the academy is. Is it a place which defines knowledge per Se or is it a place to explore the context of knowledge with a range of competing voices? I am happier with the notion that it is a place which explores the context of knowledge. This allows the definition of knowledge not only the practice of knowledge to be challenged by competing voices and enables the discourse of learning to be fluid. Power relations and inequalities can be addressed in relation to the context of knowledge acquisition. This is an alternative discourse to the popularist notion of scientism. It is rooted in the enlightenment but critical in its grasp of what knowledge is. As Michel Foucault suggests our concern should be; 'what is this Reason that we use? What are its historical effects? What are its limits, and what are its dangers?'[7]

Recognition of Prior Learning rather than Accreditation of Prior Learning. A Life History approach.

In developing a scheme for the University of Sussex I have used a life history approach to the recognition of prior learning. This approach is based on recent developments in education practice, Oral History and Sociology in Europe, America and in Britain. It is premised on a notion that to explore your life history offers a way of contextualizing learning and experience within a social framework. It allows individuals to shape and explore their experiences within their own choice of narrative. This enables participants to explore the construction of their selves and how experience has shaped their subjectivity. Pierre Dominice has been using the technique of personal biography in training adult educators in Geneva. He says of the approach; 'it offers a participatory approach which will help adults become more aware of and more responsible for their learning process.'[8]

The Recognition of Prior Learning scheme at Sussex is working in this tradition. It offers claimants an initial counselling interview which helps them analysis their learning experiences and enables them to identify if they wish to pursue their claim. They are able to further their claim by taking a module, 'Learning from Life', which helps them in a group environment reflect on their prior learning in relation to their self identity and the construction of knowledge. It is not simply an autobiography but a structured examination of the learning experiences in their life. As with the Geneva model, 'Participants have to focus on the process of how they became themselves and how they learned what they know through the various contexts, life stages and people who were relevant to their education.[9] We tell 'our story' in different ways in different times, focusing on different aspects depending on the requirements. Participants are asked to reflect upon this particular presentation of themselves. Comparisons are draw between this functional 'life history' and their own self identity. Discussions on the need for 'evidence' in a APL claim and its distinction from learning itself follows. These discussions are fruitful and help the claimants to explore what academic knowledge is in contrast to their own experience. Participants are then given support to produce their claim.

It is important to separate out an individual life history, their particular learning which will be necessary for their claim for credit and the evidence required for the claim to succeed. Participants are not offering their lives for credit or even their learning. What they are offering is the evidence they have been able to accumulate which would satisfy the limited, and often mystifying, concerns of the academy.

The shift from Accreditation of Prior (experiential) Learning to Recognition of Prior (experiential) Learning is significant. Our concern was that claimants' learning would always be recognised but because of the limitations of academic knowledge it would not always be accredited. This would appear to me to be not only honest but also less invasive to people's lives. This gives them some ownership of not only their learning but their social self construction as well. .

Many of the concerns which I have raised here are concerns which relate to the structure of our society and the ways in which we have privileged certain types of knowledge and ways of seeing over others. Recognising prior learning obviously will not change the structures of our society but exploring the questions raised by using a life history approach for RPL, rather than simply trying to find structures which the institution will accept, does challenge both, the way we construct knowledge in the academy and the way we construct the individuals who participate in learning.

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5.A variety of theorists coming from psychoanalysis and social psychology offer explanations for this process. For some interesting examples see G H Mead, *Mind Self and Society* 1933, E Goffman *The presentation of Self in everyday life* 1957, Janet Sayers *Sexual Contradictions* 1987

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THE IMPORTANCE OF IDENTITY AND DIFFERENCE IN RELATION TO THE LIFE HISTORIES OF LEARNERS: WORK IN PROGRESS.

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This paper will focus on the interplay between identity and difference and their theoretical significance in relation to the use of life history research for eliciting personal accounts of secondary school students' educational and learning experiences. This begins with a review of the theoretical understanding of identity, from the 'great collective social identities' to the politics of difference and representation. I will also assess the theoretical and practical implications regarding the notion of difference in relation to identity; and highlight how the tension which is created between accepting: (a) the notion of a multiple and shifting identity in which several differences are embodied; and (b) the importance of historical and social structures in relation to the formation of identity; can be resolved by adopting the use of life histories.

The second part of this paper reveals how life history research, when framed by theories of difference, can provide students with the opportunity to convey their own lives as they perceive them whilst enabling researchers to gain a better understanding of how differences interact, are interpreted and become constructed within educational settings. A number of the methodological flaws related to the use of this method are also addressed. Finally I will present this theoretical framework in relation to my research interests.

Identity and the Politics of Representation.

The cultural homogeneity of the 1950's was challenged by the emergence of identity politics which, structured on polarising binarisms, enabled marginal groups to assert the importance of their diverse voices and experiences. This was based on the assumption that there was an intrinsic and essential content to any particular identity which can be traced to an authentic common origin or structure of experience (Grossberg 1994), and led to the development of the 'great collective social identities' which were thought of:

> as large scale, all encompassing, homogeneous, as unified collective identities, which could be spoken about almost as if they were singular actors in their own right but which, indeed, placed, positioned, stabilized and allowed us to understand and read, almost as a code, the imperatives of the individual self: The great collective social identities of social class, of race, of nation, of gender, and of the West (Hall:1991:44).

Although these great collective social identities have not disappeared they can no longer be thought of in the same homogeneous form, as conceptual thought now focuses on their inner differences, contradictions and fragmentations. This has also led to abandoning the unproductive search for grand theories which specify the interconnections between social class, gender and race, and which are best construed as historically contingent and context specific relationships. Consequently the great collective social identities in relation to our cultural and individual identities are no longer the structuring and stabilizing force they once were: race, class and gender are not the answers in cultural studies, the bottom line explanation to which all life may be reduced; they are precisely the problems posed - their history, their formation, their 'articulation' with particular historical events or artistic works (Denning:1992:38).

The realization in the impossibility of developing fully constituted, separate and distinct identities led to the emergence of the politics of difference and representation, which was based on the belief that the identity of any term depends on its relation to, and its difference from, its constitutive other. This shift in emphasis on identities and differences highlighted the importance of the connection between the fragments, as well as the articulations between the differences, and the challenge then became how "to theorise more than one difference at once" (Mercer:1992:34).

This challenge was met by the re-emergence of postmodernism which involves the rejection of all essentialist and transcendental conceptions of human nature, and highlights fragmentation, particularity and difference. Whilst this position can be viewed as liberating in its refusal of certainty, and has provided us with the basis for critiquing the logic of identity which denies or represses difference; it can equally be seen as "paralysing in its deconstruction of all 'principled positions'" (Squires:1993:1), as an increasing number of commentators have expressed concern over the practical implications of using deconstruction as a method for exposing the contradictions and assumptions within existing discourses. This is because due to the unending process of deconstruction, signification inevitably depends upon the continual repositioning of its differential terms, consequently "meaning in any specific instance depends on the contingent and arbitrary stop" (Hall:1991:51). Thus Hall suggests that in order to speak you have to be positioned somewhere, even if you are positioned in order to unposition yourself.

It is important for positioning to be viewed as contingent because dominant groups often appeal to bonds of common cultural experience in order to create new political identities, and although this may lead to their assertion of a seemingly essentialist difference, this challenge to one form of oppression may inevitably lead to the reinforcement of another. For example whilst the political category 'Black' (as an essentialism) was extremely important in the anti-racist struggles of the 1970's it had a certain way of silencing other dimensions (i.e. gender, social class) that were positioning individuals/groups in a similar way (Hall:1991). Therefore although it "may be over ambitious,...it is imperative that we do not compartmentalise oppressions, but instead formulate strategies for challenging all oppressions on the basis of an understanding of how they interconnect and articulate" (Brah:1992:144).

What is at stake here is not a rejection of universalism in favour of particularism, but the need for a new type of articulation between the universal and the particular.......it should be possible to conceive of individuality as constituted by the intersection of a multiplicity of identifications and collective identities that constantly subvert each other (Mouffe:1993:79).

One of the key dilemmas of contemporary theorising is how to balance a theoretical rejection of essentialism, objectivism and universalism with a commitment to non-oppressive, democratic and pluralistic values (Squires 1993). But as Hall (1991) has argued, 'living identity through difference' recognises that we are all composed of multiple social identities, and thus any attempt to organise people in relation to their diversity of identifications has to be a struggle that is conducted positionally. As:

> we are all complexly constructed through different categories, of different antagonisms, and these may have the effect of locating us socially in multiple positions of marginality and subordination, but which do not yet operate on us in exactly the same way (Hall: 1991:57).

Consequently in order to develop a representational pedagogy we must try to understand "how identities are produced differently (and) how they take up the narratives of the past through the stories and experiences of the present .... (by) rewriting the relationship between identity and difference through a retelling of the historical past" (Giroux:1994:50).

The Role of Life History Research.

Life history research can offer a much needed antidote to the depersonalised, ahistorical accounts which presently proliferate the literature on schooling, and provide us with insights into individuals' perceptions of the social structure.

When one conducts a life history interview the findings become alive in terms of historical processes and structural constraints. People do not wander around the world in a timeless, structureless limbo. They themselves acknowledge the importance of historical factors and structural constraints (Faraday and Plummer:1979:780).

Because postmodernists argue that identity is multiple, shifting, contradictory and therefore constructed, not by personal interactions with 'universal truths', but by the interplay of changing historical and social structures with individual subject positions; individuals will inevitably be located within many arenas of difference and find themselves struggling with "varying and often contradictory subject positions which are constructed around gender, race and class, ethnicity and sexual preference which intersect in a variety of ways" (Norquay:1990:292).

The notion of a multiple and shifting identity in which several differences are embodied, and the importance of historical / social structures to identify formation suggests that there needs to be a different approach to Life History research so that experience is no longer accepted as either 'unique' or 'given', and the desirability of a unified self is replaced with the acknowledgement of the multiple and contradictory self (Norquay:1990:292).

I believe that life history research can take into account the role that social, ideological and historical forces have in the construction of both identity and experience. Nevertheless it needs to be framed by theories of difference so that current practices which often silence and invalidate students on account of constructions of difference can be challenged. This will then provide us with a method of interpreting the past which can lead to a better understanding of how difference is constructed within educational settings whilst emphasising the way in which social class, gender and race interact with schooling (Norquay 1990).

Within educational research very few studies have paid attention to the individual's point of view. Ayers (1990) argues that as a result questions such as - how do children understand their situations?; how do they survive, construct a meaningful world?; what are their aims and how do their goals change over time? - have largely been overlooked and the students who are probably in the best position to answer these questions ignored. My research is an attempt to provide students with the opportunity to convey their lives as they perceive them and portray their representations of the world. To achieve this I believe that we should explore memories in terms of the significant personal experiences (SPEs) which have occurred throughout an individual's life and which "supports the view that identity is neither forced nor static and that individuals have multiple subject positions from which they make sense of their world" (Norquay:1990:291). By following this approach I hope to: (a) show how memories of SPEs highlight the way in which the social and the subjective constitute 'the self'; (b) examine the ways in which our reconstructions of the past intersect with the constructions of class, gender and race; and in doing so, (c) confirm the belief that a single narrative of a unified self is inefficient as identity is multiple, shifting and contradictory.

There are far too many methodological problems associated with the use of life history data to discuss in detail here, but below is an outline of some of the main issues. To begin with because life history research is collaborative, negotiated and co-constructed, the ability to build up rapport is crucial and can only be achieved if all concerned are willing to operate in 'good faith', this also helps counteract the effect of participants who may not tell the truth or whole truth as they perceive it. In addition although every effort must be made to retain and defend the authenticity of the participants' account, problems relating to lapsed memory or partial / selective recall must be accounted for. It has also been argued that making sense of ourselves in our own terms can be narcissistic or solipsistic, but this can be counter-balanced with the use of an interpretive framework which can provide the data with meaning that extends beyond individual stories.

In relation to validity, although it can be argued that the significant personal experiences and events which occur throughout an individuals' lifetime are easily remembered, the actual process of making the implicit explicit, and the unconscious conscious, may reshape the nature of how experiences are known and understood. However Butt and Raymond (1989) claim that the constant revision of individuals' autobiographies over time, can be viewed as a type of longitudinal or vertical cross checking. Ethically, particularly when working with children, concern must be paid to the problems of power relations, access, credibility, reliability, and articulatedness, much of which can be addressed with the use of unstructured interviews which helps to empower children by maximising their control of the interview situation (Beer 1989).

Finally Goodson (1991) suggests that the specificity of life stories can hinder the process of generalisation. However, we can simultaneously represent both commonality and uniqueness by comparing and contrasting small collections of stories, and through the accumulation of these comparisons build up an idea of what is common and unique (Butt and Raymond 1989). Nevertheless the possibility of distorting accounts during the process of concentrating life story data into particular themes and issues must be acknowledged.

From the participants' point of view life history research can be a powerful, transformative experience because "within this self-creation, this set of meaning-making, people are often surprised by their own memories, actions and goals, and finds that surprise becomes the occasion to change directions, to redouble efforts, to surpass themselves" (Ayers:1990:273). In addition life history research provides "a greater possibility of setting the research subject free; a greater opportunity for reflexivity is offered, and 'inner private definitions' can be presented" (Goodson and Walker:1988:119).

This theoretical framework provides the backdrop to my fieldwork which was conducted in 4 secondary schools with the participation of 60 year 10 and 11 students whose backgrounds cut across social class, gender and race. A series of interviews were conducted with each student and focused on the importance of each students' significant personal experiences and events (as defined within their life histories) in relation to: (a) their constructions of their multiple, shifting and contradictory identities (with particular emphasis on the importance of social class, gender and race); and (b) their perceptions, attitudes and beliefs towards learning in general, and towards themselves as learners. The findings from this research prcject (which is due for completion in September 1995) will hopefully confirm that life history research can provide us with the ability to tackle issues of social difference, contradictory accounts, and multiple and shifting identities which enables us to "permanently disrupt constructions of difference that work to invalidate or stereotype the students whose lives we so fleetingly touch" (Norquay:1990:299).

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LIFE HISTORIES IN A HISTORICAL CONTEXT
A Study of women activists in Uttar Pradesh: a state in North India

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Introduction

Documenting a life history generates the feeling of being an outsider who approaches an unknown territory. It involves an intrusion in the participants 'space' and then confronting the dilemma of interacting with that 'space'. Consequently, there is the need for the critical interaction between the interviewer and the interviewed. This observation has been made on the basis of my experiences in documenting life histories in India.

There is a fine line between life history and oral history.(1) Life histories may or may not involve a narrator or an interviewer. It can be biographical if an interpreter is involved and autobiographical if the 'outside' influence is to be minimal. Oral life history is interactive and oral interviews are one method of creating a life history. However, research involving either of the studies can be used for writing individual pieces or wider contextualised historical pieces.

This paper is on the interaction between gender, colonialism and nationalism in India during 1925-1945. Specifically, my research is on the participation of women in the nationalist movement in Uttar Pradesh, a state in North India. As a historian I have used analytical tools from my field to study gender relations in the colonial period and oral life histories are an important part of my research.

The validity of spoken life histories

I gathered that a good way to answer the questions raised in my research could be by looking into what the respondents themselves felt about their participation in the Nationalist Movement.(2) All the respondents had been involved, at some point, in the Nationalist Movement from the Civil-disobedience (1930's) to the Quit-India movement. The exercise of conducting and documenting life histories was very beneficial. Firstly, it established a delicate balance between life histories as an informal learning process and their validity as historical data. Secondly, while researching on a women's movement, interviews of women participants were vital because their emotions, feelings and reactions were as important as the theoretical data in most of the government archives. In other words, I realised that in order to 'write' about a movement one had to 'feel' it first and conducting interviews was immensely beneficial. Thirdly, the process of recording life histories and placing them in a historical context helped many 'undocumented' histories to surface. The history of marginalised groups has been the centre of research of many Women Studies departments and to a limited extent the history of marginalised groups has been 'recovered'. However, conducting interviews helped me to bridge the gap between what researchers have to say about marginalised groups and when marginalised groups speak for themselves. In particular context 'marginalised' are those particular women who have not entered any historical tracts even though the nature of their activities was as important if not more than any other women activist who secured the upper echelons of ministerial power for themselves, later on.(3) A series of questions were concerned with problematising definitions of politics and political activism.

This paper while highlighting the importance of life histories in interdisciplinary analyses, explores its relationship not only with research data but also as a learning process between the interviewer and the respondent. Spoken life histories discussed were developed on the idea of a nexus established between the interviewer and the respondent.

Dilemmas as a researcher

While documenting spoken life histories in India I was bound to a certain extent by the social surroundings and social norms of the Indian society which were different from my privileged position as an 'investigating subject' in Britain. I shared a torn consciousness of the 'other' when viewed as an Indian researcher from Britain (and having the advantage of coming back to Britain to document), and of identifying myself as one of the 'others' whose history had been misrepresented by the dominant cultures, in this case Britain. I was also anxious whether the spoken life histories would fit in with my theoretical framework and whether they would be 'feminist' enough to be accommodated within the current debates of feminist theory and practice. For example to many women concepts like **gender** consciousness and **gender equality** made very little sense. Would then these women be classified as non-feminists or gender-blind? I thought it best to understand the respondents on their own terms, instead of imposing feminist categories to facilitate my research. Also, it was essential to take into consideration the influence of the Indian society and its values on the respondents during the early 1930's.

I tried to convince my respondents that it was not the glamour of their nationalist participation that I was looking for. Instead, an account of their anxieties, problems and more importantly, their experience of being a woman in the movement rather than just an activist was crucial. For women especially, the nationalist movement was a period of great transition and upheaval. They were ridden with conflicts and ambiguities which had to be resolved both in the home and on the streets. Through the interviews, I realised that women did not take to nationalist activities unproblematically. Also, the idea of conflicts/ambiguities/ contradictions makes the whole trajectory of women's nationalist involvement problematic.

Research Techniques

Doing research and maintaining research techniques as informal as possible provided an experience in learning not only about the historical reality but also in establishing a non-hierarchical relationship between myself and the respondent. An 'interactive' approach was seen as essential. During my interviews of women activists I realised that to narrate to a complete stranger i.e. myself, details of their lives, it was necessary for the respondent to build up some confidence towards and in me. Asking me questions was one way that an atmosphere of reciprocity and confidentiality was maintained. Also, the respondents questions to me helped to diffuse the power relations(when one person asks questions and another gives the answers) between the researcher and the researched which traditional ways of interviewing sets up. Traditional methods of following a planned questionnaire, maintaining a bias free interview and conforming to consciously created 'masculine' text-book methodology were avoided (Oakley,1981:35).

Nature of the Oral life histories.

I interviewed nearly 30 women activists who had contributed to the nationalist movement in some way or the other. A lot of questions have been left unanswered not only because of time constraints but also because the respondents could not answer them. In this paper I will discuss my experiences of interviewing middle class women activists in Uttar Pradesh. My interviews were completed over a couple of days and each interview session lasted from 3-4 hours. As mentioned earlier, most women have not surfaced in any historical tracts. Also, the close family members (the sons and daughters with whom they were staying) of these women participants had shown no interest towards the respondents earlier nationalist activities. Consequently, my position as a researcher and an interviewer for a common purpose(my interest in Gender studies) gave these women activists an opportunity not only to speak their minds but also to interact with myself.(4). Often I realised that documenting spoken life histories was not an isolated interviewer-respondent relationship but that I found myself confronted and drawn into the whole familial nexus. The immediate family were as important as the respondents herself. The nature of the immediate influence(mother, father or inlaws) the social constraints of the time primarily adhering to norms like purdah, general confinement in the home, dichotomy between the roles, the difference in the expected social behaviour of married and unmarried women), promoted and inhibited the level of awareness and involvement in nationalist activities of individual women.

Conducting interviews was a learning process for me. There were continuous shifts from my interest in research vis a vis the respondents to aligning with them on a more humane plane. For example on certain occasions I realised that women respondents felt personally insecure. The primary reason was age and most of them were not economically well off. They were dependant on their family members for their needs and even the pensions they received was a small amount. (5).

Conclusion

During the course of documenting and analysing spoken life histories I could to a limited extent expose lacunas in the existing written historical and sociological tracts. However, alternatively, I do not claim to provide an 'authentic voice' for the women interviewed. My intention is to problematise simple interpretations forwarded by academicians for women's participation in the nationalist movement. For clarity of my ideas, spoken life histories and the interaction established with the respondents was crucial. The 'social distance' between the interviewer (myself) and the respondents was minimised not only on the basis of a shared gender but also on the basis of a common anti-colonial experience.

Notes

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1. I am grateful to Joanna Liddle and Dr. Ravinder Thiara for their useful comments on this paper.
2. The other sources of data used are government records- intelligence reports, fortnightly and home poll records and vernacular literature in Hindi.
3. Many women who entered government bodies had the additional support of their 'guardians' (fathers and husbands) who were also politically active.

4. My concern with gender issues and my simultaneous position as an interviewer helped in generating a feeling of trust in me. Some of the respondents had expressed their reservations about the mercenary activities of journalists and reporters who on many occasions had fabricated details to 'complete' the picture.
5. In India old members of the household are looked upon with veneration rather than as responsible contributory members. Their needs like getting their meals at the right time or consideration towards their sleeping habits are considered to be more important.

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WOMEN, EDUCATION AND CLASS: NARRATIVES OF LOSS IN THE FICTION OF ANNIE ERNAUX

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The feminist novel of self development is characterised by a positive trajectory; whatever losses and griefs she may endure en route, the feminist heroine of the final pages is a wiser, more politically aware and in many cases happier person. As Rita Felski has pointed out, these novels are a recent adaptation of a well-established literary form, which since the eighteenth century has been concerned with the narration of individual self-improvement (Felski, 1989). In this sense Goethe's Wilhelm Meister, Educating Rita or Marie Cardinal's The Words to Say It can all be seen as cultural manifestations of a deeply-rooted desire to depict individual lives as if from a position of hindsight, as movement from darkness into light, from confusion to understanding. This tendency is clearly not confined to fiction; emotional life involves a constant re-telling of the story in the light of new insights, and the formation of temporary closures, which we often endow with a 'permanent' significance. In this paper I will be discussing two examples of Annie Ernaux' autobiographical fiction, which both reproduce and problematise the generally positive trajectory of the novel of self-development: Une Femme (translated as A Woman's Story) and Les Armoires Vides (translated as Cleaned Out). If this paper is mainly concerned with textual analysis, I hope in my conference presentation to discuss it in relation to the process of reading, to my own life-history, and more generally to the ways in which fictional narratives can participate in the construction of identity.

If the feminist 'Bildungsroman' concentrates on the narrator's increasing awareness of the impact of gender on her experience and identity, the writing of Annie Ernaux represents the construction of gender identity as inextricably linked to the question of social class (cf. Day, 1990) . She writes fiction in the first person, and her narrators almost always share with her a working class background, which they have been able to leave behind as a result of success in the state education system. Les Armoires Vides opens with a description of the narrator's plight: she is in her room in a student hall of residence waiting for an illegal abortion to take its course. The rest of the novel recounts her childhood and adolescence, producing, in the process, an account of how everything in her past seems to have led her to this point. Une Femme is a more obviously autobiographical work, where the narrator's and author's voices seem to merge almost completely. Here, the life-history being recounted is that of the narrator's mother, and the narrative is an attempt to come to terms with the mother's death. Both novels juxtapose working-class and middle-class culture, and describe the painful emotional consequences of a move from one to the other. Before looking more closely at this emotional scenario, I would like to examine the representation of the two cultures in the novels, in order to explore what it might mean to structure a life-history around a change of class through formal education. Because I am looking at class in cultural rather than economic terms here, and because he is theorising the very society which Ernaux is representing in fiction, I have found the work of Pierre Bourdieu pertinent to this analysis.

Bourdieu's description, based on survey data, of middle-class taste in Distinction (1979) associates it with distance and abstraction, the development of a 'pure gaze' which is more interested in form than content:

> 'Rejecting the "human" clearly means rejecting what is generic, i.e. *common*, "easy" and immediately accessible, starting with everything that reduces the aesthetic animal to pure and simple animality, to palpable pleasure or sensual desire. The interest in the content of the representation which leads people to call "beautiful" the representation of beautiful things, especially those which speak most immediately to the senses and the sensibility, is rejected in favour of the indifference and distance which refuse to subordinate judgement of the representation to the nature of the object represented'. (Bourdieu, 1979, p. 32).

Bourdieu identifies here the attempt to distance oneself from direct, physical experience or pleasure as a fundamental way in which middle-class 'high' culture seeks to differentiate itself from popular aesthetics. These oppositions between immediacy and distance, mind and body, form and content, are found both in Bourdieu's theorisation of class-specific cultures and in Annie Ernaux' fictional representations. In Les Armoires Vides, the heroine's early years are described as a profusion of intense physical sensations, which includes, but is not subsumed by the sexual:

> 'Ninise Lesur, growing up in the fug, among the bits of chewed-up tobacco, the tomatoes softening behind the closed shutters in summer.....The kitten-like delight in opening my eyes and looking, everything there for the taking. Even if now I find it distasteful to remember what I liked, what I admired. The world was there in thousands of shreds of hunger, of thirst, of desires to touch, to tear, all joined together by one solid little thread, me, chatty little Denise Lesur' (Ernaux, 1974, pp 46-47 *).

It is only when she goes to school that Denise learns that this 'pure and simple animality' is irrelevant, and even unacceptable in her new surroundings, and that on the contrary the body is to be controlled and subordinated to a culture of arid abstraction. The uncomfortable environment and the discipline of long hours of classes are the physical expression of the cultural lessons to be learnt: the primacy of the intellectual over the physical, as well as formality and 'refinement' of language and tastes. The school's 'big, cold yard edged by lime trees' is contrasted with the small yard at home: 'with its odorous boxes and crates, the acid-yellow jars in the shop window'. The serried ranks of lime trees, typical of the French urban environment, seem here to symbolise cold rationality, in contrast with the vivid smells and colours associated with home. Distance from the physical is accompanied by distance from other people, as social relations are conducted in a formal language which at first Denise is able to understand but not to reproduce, and which seems to Denise to lack the force of meaning which characterises her parents' rich, colloquial speech:

> 'School was a muddle of signs, to be repeated, traced, assembled. How much more real my parents' cafe and shop seemed to me. School was a constant pretence, pretending it's funny, pretending it's interesting, pretending it's good' (Ernaux, 1974, p.54).

At first, Denise does not realise that there is a power relationship between the two cultures; she passes between them easily, gradually learning that what is appropriate in one is unacceptable in the other. Eventually academic success provides Denise with automatic approval from the same teachers and class-mates who humiliated her when she first arrived at school, and she is increasingly assimilated by the middle-class culture which the school promulgates. She begins to see her parents, and her own physicality with new and shameful eyes, associating the latter at a profound level with her sense of shame in relation to her social origins. The cultural construction of the binary oppositions described above, which 'justifies' the predominance, or in Bourdieu's terms legitimacy, of bourgeois culture, has here been internalised as a result of a particular trajectory. I will now turn to the emotional consequences of this internalisation, and to the theme of loss, both in Les Armoires Vides and Une Femme.

Like the feminist 'Bildungsroman', Les Armoires Vides is written from a position of hindsight, of superior knowledge and awareness, but at the end of the novel the reader does not have any sense that this knowledge or awareness is beneficial or comforting to the heroine on an emotional level. The most positive statement that Denise is able to make at this point is that she does not want to die. She is unable to reconcile the two worlds which have 'cut her in half'. She has learnt that her acceptability in middle-class culture is only partial, that academic success is not enough. Ernaux seems to be allowing her heroine to discover, through her relationship with a middle-class boy, what Bourdieu has described as the difference between 'inherited' and 'acquired' cultural capital. The boy has the self-assurance which results from 'immersion in a world in which legitimate culture is as natural as the air one breathes' (Bourdieu, 1979, pp. 91-92). Contact with him heightens Denise's sense of herself as not quite the genuine article. Gender and class oppression combine as the boy, a Law student, assures her that her literary studies are a flight from reality:

> 'Even literature is a symptom of poverty, the classic way of escaping from your class. False from head to toe, where is my real nature? He isn't just talking about me, he's talking generally, and yet I feel my uselessness, my insignificance' (Ernaux, 1974, p.170).

If the relationship was the culmination of the heroine's attempts to free herself from her background through the expression of her sexuality, at the end of the novel this has backfired disastrously. It is as if her body, which she always experienced as the site of her original class identity, is seeking to remind her, by becoming pregnant, of some indelible inferiority. The cultural association of the body with popular culture discussed earlier combines with patriarchal control of femele sexuality with the result that for the 'socially mobile' working-class girl it is her own sexuality which can betray and relegate her to her less privileged origins. The child's innocent delight in the strength and capacity for pleasure of her own body has been replaced by the sense that it carries all of the conflicting emotions which the change of class has generated, and is therefore the concrete expression of psychic pain:

> 'No-one is here for me. All alone I must empty myself of the little bag of reddish hatred, that never had a chance'. (Ernaux, 1974, p. 180)

The hatred referred to here has been directed at her own parents and their milieu. Her new perspective, resulting from her education, has brought her to see her own parents in the terms of the dominant culture, as crude and vulgar. This disillusionment is reminiscent of Freud's analysis of 'family romances', where the child longs for 'the happy, vanished days when his father seemed to him the noblest and strongest of men and his mother the loveliest and dearest of women' (Freud, 1909). The general need to shed the idealisation of parents as perfect beings, described by Freud as an aspect of normal development, is here exacerbated by change of class. If idealisation is followed, at adolescence, by rejection, and later by reconciliation, the latter is difficult, if not impossible for Denise, since she cannot go back:

> ' Caught between two stools, you're pushed towards hatred, I had to choose. Even if I wanted to, I could not talk like them any more, it's too late'. (Ernaux, 1974, p. 181)

Betrayed by middle-class culture, both literally, since her boyfriend has deserted her in her hour of need, and symbolically, since she has realised she only partly belongs to it, Denise is unable to go back to the only people who really care for her. She is marooned in a culture which cannot nourish her emotionally, struggling with a range of negative feelings which result directly from her class trajectory. Although Les Armoires Vides charts the history of an individual woman's development and increasing political awareness, we are denied the final moment of triumph, and on the contrary faced with an ambivalent and emotionally complex representation of education and social mobility. The dominant view of education as positive progression is here problematised by the introduction of the emotional dimension.

Une Femme provides further nuances to this theme. Its heroine, much closer to the real Annie Ernaux, is materially well-established, and seems to have reached an accommodation with her changed class position. Nonetheless, she is thrown into crisis by the senility and death of her mother. If the heroine of Les Armoires Vides has internalised the split between middle and working-class culture, in Une Femme, the split is represented by the contrasting characters and situations of mother and daughter. Whilst the latter is comfortably integrated through education and marriage into the bourgeoisie, the mother's relation to her daughter's new class remains one of aspiration. As in Les Armoires Vides, early childhood is represented as a golden age, though here the emphasis is more on an untroubled intimacy with both parents, and particularly the mother, and slightly less on her own body:

> ' Her flesh bulged through the criss-cross of laces, joined together at the waist by a knot and a small rosette. I knew every detail of her body. I thought that I would grow up to become her.

One Sunday they are having a picnic on the edge of an embankment near the woods. I remember being between them, in a warm nest of voices, flesh and continual laughter. [.....] I believe we were both in love with my mother'. (1990 translation of Ernaux, 1988, p.35)

Psychoanalytical accounts of the mother/daughter relationship, from Freud to Susie Orbach, though divergent in interpretation, often share the notion of a merging of identity, an absence of boundaries between mother and daughter. In Une Femme, and to some extent, Les Armoires Vides, the early identification and painful separation at adolescence are coloured not only by social constructions of gender, but also by the class issue. Ernaux' heroines have been accepted, through the school system, into the culture of the mind, and in this process, have lost the emotional intimacy and physical pleasures of their culture of origin. In Les Armoires Vides the most profound loss is that of her own body, innocent of the guilt and shame which school and church are later to inculcate, and free to enjoy the physical world and her own sexuality. For the heroine of Une Femme, on the other hand, the mother's death seems to bring to the surface the repressed and painful emotions resulting from the loss of the mother's culture, where the most profound intimacy has been experienced. Changing class has necessitated a rejection, not only of this culture, but also of the mother's body, which in childhood, as in the above quotation, was associated with plenitude and nurture:

> I felt drawn to the feminine ideal portrayed in *L'Echo de la Mode*. The women one read about were slim and discreet; they were good cooks and called their little girls 'darling'. They reminded me of the middle-class mothers whose daughters were my companions at school. I found my own mother's attitude brash'. (1990 translation of Ernaux, 1988, p.51)

The last sentence here, 'Je trouvais ma mere voyante' in the original, suggests that the mother's body is now associated by the daughter with socially unacceptable excess: it is too visible, too much, neither slim, nor discreet. The social process of becoming middle-class compounds the rejection of the mother's body, and attempt to separate from her at adolescence. The daughter must break free in order to express her own identity, and in particular her sexuality:

> 'When she saw me undressed, my body seemed to repel her. No doubt she saw my breasts and hips as a threat and was afraid I would start running after the boys and lose interest in my studies. She wanted me to stay a child, saying I was thirteen a week before my fourteenth birthday and making me wear pleated skirts, ankle socks and low-heeled shoes'.

Luise Eichenbaum and Susie Orbach have described how as a result of gender conditioning in patriarchal society, the daughter receives mixed messages from her mother, and takes from the mother/daughter relationship not only her mother's positive nurturance of her, but also her mother's ambivalence about her own neediness (Eichenbaum and Orbach, 1983). At the points of separation from the mother, as for example at adolescence, the daughter does not depart from the secure emotional base, which would result from internalisation of her mother's positive response to her as an infant. In the case of Ernaux' heroines, although the descriptions of early childhood contain an image of a nurturing mother, acceptance into middle-class culture means that she has to be devalued and denied. Class compounds the difficult separation process described by Eichenbaum and Orbach, forcing these daughters to cut themselves off from their emotional roots. In Les Armoires Vides Denise seeks to replicate the lost physical and emotional intimacy through her relationships with more socially acceptable objects of desire - middle-class boys. In Une Femme men are largely absent; the narrator is divorced, and her only sexual relationship, 'with a man who repelled me' is the result of her increasing distress over her mother's illness:

> 'Even though a daughter comes to look toward men, she still yearns for mother's support and care. From girlhood to womanhood women live with the experience of having lost these aspects of maternal nurturance. This nurturance is never replaced. Women look to men to nurture them but remain bereft'. (Eichenbaum and Orbach, 1983, p.52)

The narrator of Une Femme is literally bereft since the book opens with a description of her mother's funeral; similarly the grief for the mother's nurturing body which perhaps underlies the disillusionment and isolation of Denise Lesur, has here become literal, as the narrator watches the demise of her mother's mind and body:

> 'One evening in April, she was already asleep at half-past six, lying across the rumpled sheets in her slip. her knees were up, showing her private parts. It was very warm in the room. I started to cry because she was my mother, the same woman I had known in my childhood'. (1990 translation of Ernaux, 1988, p.82)

The loss in both cases is more complete, and more tinged with guilt because the daughters have not only grown up to become sexual adults, but also because they have left the mother behind in a dominated culture. Yet for the narrator of Une Femme, the primary identification remains with the mother:

> 'It took me a long time to realise that the feeling of unease my mother experienced in my own house was no different from what I felt as a teenager when I was introduced to people "a cut above us"'.
> (1990 translation of Ernaux, 1988, p.65)

Because of this identification, and the poignancy of the losses involved in becoming middle-class, writing about her culture of origin is, for Annie Ernaux, a healing process, crucial to her identity. On the surface a successful middle-class woman she writes in order to ensure that this surface identity is never seen as the whole story, and perhaps in order to compensate, through her role as witness, for her cultural abandonment of those who nurtured her. At the end of Une Femme she concludes that telling her mother's story has enabled her to feel 'less alone and artificial in the dominant world of words and ideas'*.

** This and the translations of Les Armoires Vides are my own.*

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HOW DID I GET HERE? AN ACCOUNT OF ROUTES AND DECISIONS AFFECTING ENTRY INTO AND EXPERIENCES OF HIGHER EDUCATION.

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Introduction

In recent years higher education has been passing through a period of considerable change. Evidence indicates that the student population is continuing to increase in size and also to change. For example, there is now a much wider age range with more varied experience, there are more women, a greater proportion of students come from ethnic minorities and students gain access to higher education by a much wider variety of routes. This paper describes a study intended to obtain information on the characteristics of a cohort of students, the experiences they bring with them into university, the routes they have followed to gain access and how these characteristics and experiences affect their responses to a programme of study in higher education, specifically, though, this paper concentrates upon how people got into HE.

Since the study is concerned with student experiences over time, it is designed within a biographical framework.

Theoretical Framework

As expressed here, it embraces both the area of study, student experience, and a perspective on student experience which underpins the practical research and provides the means through which research findings are interpreted and understood.

The theoretical approach was, in part, stimulated by an article by Shilling (1992) in which he suggests that there is a dichotomy in current educational research between quantitative (macro) and qualitative (micro) approaches. He argues that a theoretical framework is needed which has the capability to embrace both approaches and that structuration theory as developed by Giddens would meet this need.

This suggested to the authors that first of all the two methodological approaches ought to be deployed in the study and that a perspective was required which views experience as human agency operating within social structure.

Thus the study examines three broad areas:-

1. The quantitative, factual aspects of entry and career decisions
2. The qualitative, attitudinal, experiential aspects of entry and experience
3. A theoretical approach involving agency and structure

It is envisaged that item "3" above will be the "glue" which cements the two approaches.

A key problem in explanatory theories of life chances and choice is the extent to which individuals are both "constrained" and "pushed" by the structural (social class), cultural and perceived futures that operate within their social situation and inform (and therefore affect) their decision-making. Many writers have adopted a "determinist" account of personal careers and of the decision-making inherent in choosing careers. The work of Giddens with his emphasis on "enablement" as well as "constraint" has attempted to move away from these deterministic approaches although it seems to the authors that structuration theory as an explanatory device might not fully explain present findings.

Context of the Study: higher education

The study which is on-going (1992-95) is concerned with student experience which occurs within the context of the institution and of the higher education systems as a whole. In recent years higher education has experienced considerable change. Barnett (1992, p1) argues that change in higher education follows a pattern across the Western World. He suggests that Governments have a renewed interest in seeing an expansion in their higher education systems which has given rise to debates on "participation rates" and "access". Since higher education is expensive with both capital and labour intensive aspects, there is a requirement to educate more students at less cost.This raises problems of maintaining standards while at the same time increasing "efficiency" and "effectiveness"; attempting to ensure that "more" does not mean "worse". In Britain, Allen (1988 p47) found that the great expansion began following the end of the Second World War and originated from three sources: increased student demand, the need to improve industrial and technological training and the recognition that talent was being wasted (Crowther, 1959).

Growth was further advanced by the introduction of polytechnics. Building on the Robbins Report in 1963 the Government White Paper (DES 1966) stated that,

> **"The Government believes that the best results will be achieved by developing higher education on polytechnic lines wherever practicable"**

The "binary" system came into existence and higher education moved towards becoming a system rather than a collection of universities. Scott (1989 p12) finds that between 1965 and 1980 thirty polytechnics were established. The 1980's witnessed continued change in higher education. In 1981 (Allen, 1988) the Government announced that it intended to reduce, substantially, spending on universities and a number of common themes have arisen during the 1980's: wider access on the grounds of increased social justice and economic efficiency, more professional management and centralised policy making.

Under the terms of the Education Reform Act of 1987, polytechnics became self-governing institutions with the financial status of higher education corporations. They have now become universities. The British higher education system therefore finds itself in the situation outlined by Barnett with three questions: quality, access and funding. It is in this context that this project on student entry and experience was conceived and begun in 1992.

Method

The research carried out so far as largely been the "quantitative".

A Questionnaire was designed to gather information on student characteristics and to relate these to student experience prior to entry to university. The characteristics considered included age, gender, social class and ethnic background together with other factors which might have influenced student decision to return to education, choice of institution and factors which might affect the ability of students to cope with a higher education course, for example, family commitments and financial constraints. Experience prior to entry to university included consideration of occupational and educational background, the sources of information and influences which affected the decision of students to enter higher education and their choice of institution and course. The questionnaire was also designed to facilitate the consideration of patterns of experience prior to entry, particularly educational experience and the educational routes followed by students, but also in making use of information from other sections of the questionnaire to develop a biographical perspective linking individual career and collective pathways.

Findings

The sample of students numbered 252 who commenced their university programmes at the start of the academic year 1992/93. All respondents were following the Primary B.Ed., Modular Degrees and Diploma Scheme (MODDS) or Secondary B.Ed. programmes. All members of the former two programmes were enrolled for honours degree qualifications, while secondary programme students were initially reading for an ordinary degree with the option of an additional period of study leading to honours.

Student Characteristics

1. Social Class

Earwaker (1992) argues that higher education is now more easily available than at any time during the past, but,

> **"It may be more available but that does not means that is is more accessible. Its clients remain a privileged minority, whether they feel themselves to be or not"**

Tight (1989, p87) argues that, within what he refers to as the "dominant ideology" of higher education, the elite are carefully selected into a system in which "supply is closely rationed". Students are selected through the school system into higher education which identifies and accredits individuals with "higher level abilities". Earwaker agrees that the "crucial division" in the education system is dependent upon staying on beyond the statutory school leaving age.

Halsey (1983, p131) states that

> **"_______ though the working class child has some increased absolute chances of going in to some form of higher education - class inequalities measured in relative terms have apparently remained stable for the past three generations"**
> (despite the "spectacular educational expansion").

Earwaker (1992 p36) claims that selection is skewed towards social classes I and II and that many families in these categories "might predict a polytechnic or university place as a virtual certainty". For some students therefore admission "might be experienced as a natural progression". Roberts and Higgins (1992) find that, when students in higher education were asked to give reasons for application the most popular response was that it was a "natural thing to do". The researchers conclude that "For many students (particularly those in universities) one of the biggest decisions of their life was a non decision".

Studies of the social class of students in the past have taken parental, usually father's occupation as the basis for class allocation since students themselves had no occupation. The increasing number of mature students apparent in the study suggested the inadequacy of this approach and, given also the increase in the number of women in the labour market, it was logical that mothers should also be included.

Our results show an under representation of social classes IV and V in agreement with Halsey's findings. Both groupings are most strongly represented among mothers. In fact, none of the mothers in the sample had occupations in social class I. Occupation listed in social class II were mainly teaching, nursing and related occupations. This suggests that the roles of parents follow a traditional pattern with fathers as the primary breadwinners and mothers in traditionally women's occupations or operating to maintain a home.

2. Gender/Race

Two changes increasingly evident have been the decline of male domination of university courses (Egerton and Halsey, 1993) and decreasing differential access on the grounds of race (Modood, 1993).

Our results show that students on the programmes from which samples were drawn were predominantly female, although the Secondary programmes were significantly less female-dominated. This probably reflects specific programme subject options (e.g. mathematics and technology etc) of the Secondary programme. As a whole the sample was predominantly white (94%) and there was little variation between courses.

3. Other variables

3.1 Age: The age group of the whole sample demonstrates the changing characteristics of the student population in higher education in the proportionate increase in "mature" students. The "traditional" group, aged under 20, constitutes only a little over 30% of the sample and even when the "young" group, aged under 24, is added, "mature" students make up 45% of the sample. Division into a range of age groups shows that the largest group of mature students lies within the age range 25-40. This is particularly true of the Secondary course.

3.2 Occupational background: Over 61% of the sample has had some experience of employment and 43% had been in employment for more than three years. Over 41% had experience of unemployment.

3.3 Qualifications: Educational qualifications across the whole group were dominated by "A" level, "O" level and GCSE, the only qualifications obtained by more than 100 students in the sample. This is an indication of the dominance which "A" level still maintains in offering access to higher education. There was evidence, however, for a steady increase in the importance of BTEC and "Access" routes.

Those who stayed on at school moved to 3 major destinations, University direct, further education, work, while those who left moved into further education or work.

In order to identify and demonstrate the decision making processes more clearly an individual as well as group response to questions was made. Flow charts have therefore been devised to indicate the progress of individuals throughout their educational career from leaving school. Using data from other parts of the questionnaire response this has provided a biographical perspective. These demonstrate the increasing complexity of patterns through the age groups and provide information on both individual and group movements through the education system. It can be shown from this technique that only a small percentage of the sample (15%) came to university direct from school, or followed the "traditional route". For many of the sample, further education in a variety of forms was much more significant.

4. Important decision-making points

It has already been indicated that the decision of whether to leave school at the age of 16 or remain is one crucial decision. A second important factor is the role of partner and/or family. For instance, for the 18-24 age group of our sample, about 16% were married or cohabiting. The figure is also for 25-29 age group only 13 students (less than 40% of the sample) suggesting that those, perhaps up to the age of thirty who have family commitments are less likely to return to education than the older age groups. In addition, women students with children appear to a larger extent in the over 25 group but to a lesser extent than those over 30 suggesting that women in the 25-30 group have significant child rearing and family commitments.

Responses to the question on professional advice indicate the significance of education professionals, teachers, lecturers and career officers.

To examine some of these issues in a little more depth, some interviews were undertaken with a group of potential university students undertaking an access course at a local further education college. Among the factors constraining/enabling students to undertake high education were,

1. **Chance**
   "Life kept happening to me - instead of me happening to my life. I came to Wolverhampton because of my husband's job".

2. **Dissatisfaction with current situation**
   "I spent a long number of years doing - dull boring repetitive work".

   "I'll be able to get some sort of qualifications to show people that I'm capable of taking on......"

3. **Unhappy memories of school**
   "It was aggressive - the teachers didn't really care"

4. **The security of a wage inhibiting change**
   "There's many a time when I've felt, well I want to get out, I want to get another job, but its a wage. At the end of the day when the recession came up, I had to change".

5. **Role of parents**
   "You get pushed into what your parent think you ought to do"

6. **Lack of confidence about ability to succeed in Higher Education**
   "I know it is going to be hard, and you can fall behind very easily, but it is up to you"

Giddens has stated that constraints tend to be accompanied by enablements (Cohen, 1989 p214). However, more recently Layder (1994 p145) has criticised Giddens on the grounds that too much stress is laid on the enablement and too little on the constraints and the experience of them. Our research so far suggests that the life history of the student before and during their university career is beset by a series of decisions and turning points (which may be none-decisions), but usually involve key prior institutions -

especially schools and FE. These in fact constitute a whole series of constraints on the way to the chosen goal which tend to operate differentially on a gender/race/socio/ economic group basis. Even at university the process may continue. Earwaker (1992) argues that student experience may be viewed at three levels, personal-individual; social-interpersonal and "the corporate social experience of a segment of the population". It might also be argued that these need to be seen in the light of both the wider society and the higher education institution as a "meso" organisation. For example, expansion of student numbers and the increase in the number of mature students interacted with government policy, but different institutions responded differently to these developments.

The "collegiate experience" has been lost according to Earwaker with the student anonymity resulting from the development of larger institutions so only a small percentage of students are now resident on the campus. He argues that students now view higher education with a "down to earth instrumentality".

"Higher Education is something to avail yourself of for a purpose. Students mostly know why they are there and expect the institution to serve their purposes".

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EXPLORING EDUCATIONAL LIFE HISTORIES:
A HANDS-ON WORKSHOP IN THE MASS-OBSERVATION ARCHIVE

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This paper outlines the early stages of a project researching adult learning and life histories. A data set of 453 educational life histories which are available at the Mass-Observation Archive in the University of Sussex provide a superb resource for educational research. In the paper I discuss the background to the project and outline a range of ways in which these life histories might be used by researchers, and some of the issues arising from such research. At the conference we will visit the Archive and see how the life history material has been generated and arranged, and will then use a selection of materials for a hands-on workshop discussion.

From Oral History to Adult Education

A further, implicit concern of the paper is the way in which the life history of the researcher shapes the research agenda and research approaches. This research is an attempt to connect my own background in oral history with a new role as an adult education researcher, and to bring theoretical issues and approaches from life history work into adult education research.

My academic training is in the field of history, and for much of my working life I have been employed as an oral historian in community, institutional and academic oral history projects. Like many oral historians an initial and on-going impetus for seeking oral testimony has been to recover voices from below, the stories of individuals and communities whose lives have been hidden from history. Yet in the 1970s these democratic aspirations and methods of the resurgant oral history movement were subjected to savage criticisms by traditional, documentary historians.

The main thrust of the criticisms was that memory was unreliable as a historical source because it was distorted by the deterioration of age, by personal bias and nostalgia, and by the influence of other, subsequent versions of the past. Underlying these criticisms was concern about the democratisation of the historians' craft being facilitated by oral history groups, and disparagement of oral history's apparent 'discrimination' in favour of women, workers and migrant groups. Goaded by the taunts of documentary historians, the early handbooks of oral history developed a canon to assess the reliability of oral memory (while shrewdly reminding the traditionalists that documentary sources were no less selective and biased). From social psychology and anthropology they showed how to determine the bias and fabulation of memory, the significance of retrospection and the effects of the interviewer upon remembering. From sociology they adopted methods of representative sampling, and from documentary history they brought basic rules for checking the reliability and internal consistency of their source. The new canon provided useful signposts for reading memories, and for combining them with other historical sources to find out what happened in the past.1

However, the tendency to defend and use oral history as just another historical source to find out 'how it really was' led to neglect of other values of oral testimony. In their efforts to correct bias and fabulation some practitioners lost sight of the reasons why individuals compose their memories in particular ways, and did not see how the process of remembering could be a key to understanding the ways in which certain individual and collective versions of the past are active in the present. By seeking to discover one single, fixed and recoverable history, some oral historians tended to neglect the multivalence of individual memory and the plurality of versions of the past provided by different speakers (as well as different documentary sources). They did not see that the 'distortions' of memory could be a resource as much as a problem.

In recent years oral historians have become more interested in exploring the relationships between memory and subjectivity, and between collective memory and remembering. We are now more self-conscious about the distinctive character of oral testimony, and assert the theoretical and methodological values of the qualitative approach in oral history research.2 As Paul Thompson commented in the editorial of Oral History in Autumn 1989:

> Our early somewhat naive methodological debates and enthusiasm for testimonies of 'how it really was' have matured into a shared understanding of the basic technical and human issues of our craft, and equally important, a much more subtle appreciation of how every life story inextricably intertwines both objective and subjective evidence - of different, but equal value.3

For example, in my own oral history research about Ausralian war veterans, I moved from exploring the hidden histories of working class soldiers to assessing the impact of the Australian national war legend (the Anzac legend) upon veterans' memories and identities.4 More recently, now that I have moved into adult education work (in one sense a natural progression from community oral history projects which often served as a site for informal adult education and learning) I am trying to bring the new theoretical and methodologial approaches in oral history to bear upon adult education teaching and research. For example, inspired by Swiss approaches to training adult educators, Mary Stuart and myself have created a Postgraduate Diploma in Adult Learning and Life Histories at the University of Sussex. Participants in this course - most of whom teach in community, further or higher education - will focus on their own educational life histories, and those of other adult learners, in order to explore issues about learning through life. One of the teaching and research resources we are using for this course is the extensive collection of the Mass-Observation Archive, which is based at the University of Sussex.

Autobiographical Writing and the Mass-Observation Archive

The criticisms suffered by oral historians and oral testimony have also been directed at research using autobiographical writing, and indeed at qualitative research data and methods in general. The example with which I am most familiar is the debate about the Mass-Observation project and archive. Mass-Observation (M-O) was a British social research organisation influenced by earlier Polish and Chicago sociological traditions of using life documents for research. It operated between 1937 and 1950 and recruited volunteers to join a 'panel' of writers recording aspects of their everyday life. In 1981, the Tom Harrison Mass-Observation Archive, which houses the diaries and detailed questionnaire responses produced by the original project, initiated a revival of the panel of volunteer writers.

The new M-O was closely related to the development of oral history in the 1970s and 1980s and its aims of validating the lived experiences of 'ordinary people'. Yet the new project differs from oral history by specialising in written material and accumulating sets of autobiographical writing about contemporary rather than past experience. Three of four times a year panel members are invited to respond to open-ended and discursive questionnaires (Directives) about subjects ranging from international and domestic political issues to everyday personal practices. Occasionally panelists are asked to provide detailed one day diaries, or to record their experiences during the course of a particular event (such as the Falkland and Gulf Wars, and the 1992 General Election). Over 400,000 pages of typed and hand-written material have been amassed, representing the contributions of over 2,500 volunteer writers from all over the United Kingdom.

In the years between the two M-O projects, quantitative sociologists denounced the research validity of M-O material and targetted the inaccuracy of recall, the likelihood of fictionalisation, and the unrepresentativeness of a small sample of self-selected respondents. Researchers using either set of M-O material need to meet those criticisms. In response to the latter criticism of the 'unrepresentative sample', it is perfectly possible to produce a profile of M-O writers (including details such as occupational status, gender, age and regional location), and to compare the profile of respondents to a particular directive with the national profile. Indeed, the Archive is currently facilitating such approaches by producing a computerised database of respondents.

However, as Dorothy Sheridan argues, '"representativeness" itself is ideologically constructed; its dominant meaning focusses on the individual, a single voice, and on the assumption that people can only be seen to represent themselves, and that the quality of representativeness lies not in what they say, but in who they are (as defined by selected socio-economic characteristics)'. Sheridan, who is both Archivist and researcher at M-O, asks us to consider who and what the Mass-Observers are writing for and representing. She argues that they often write for 'the experience of others sharing the same or similar historical experiences'. Their writing 'is at the same time singular and collective'. Furthermore, Mass-Observers also write for an audience of inscribed or imagined readers ('people like them', descendants, the archivist, future readers, posterity), so that their writing is negotiated and shaped in relation to that perceived audience.[5]

Sheridan's analysis of M-O writing takes M-O researchers beyond the narrow criticisms of quantitative positivists and opens up exciting issues about the forms, meanings and significance of different types of life history documents. Sheridan reasserts 'the privileged access which autobiography can provide into a dimension of human reality which would be difficult to come to from other means:

> Through autobiography we may come to learn about people's hopes and fears, their individual choices in relation to wider social and political change, their rational and unconscious motives for acting, and, above all, the meaning and significance which they give their lives.[6]

More than that, I would argue that the search for a representative sample by some M-O users and critics has missed much of the research value of this type of autobiographical writing: that it can be illuminating about how and why people write and represent their lives in particular ways (and about the personal meanings and functional values of such writing); that the individual case studies can help us to understand not only how people live their lives in society, but also how they articulate, comprehend and shape their lives in relation to public narratives.

Mass-Observation and Educational Research

Paul Armstrong has produced an invaluable essay and guide book which outlines practical and theoretical issues for using life history methods in educational research.[7] He notes that in the past educational research has also been dominated by the quantitative paradigm, but that in recent years there has been a resurgance of research using qualitative strategies. Armstrong lists the following multifaceted contributions which the life history method makes to educational research: it facilitates exploratory studies and complements other source material;

it enables exploration of individual subjectivity and of process and change in life history; it helps researchers to locate particular experiences within individuals' overall life histories, as well as in the broad socio-historical background; and it encourages critical analysis of educational assumptions and generalisations. Qualitative approaches also facilitate praxis (making links between theory and practice) and participatory research, both of which have been significant features of much adult education research, and arguably adult education's major contributions to research methodology.

Armstrong lists a number of adult education research projects which have used life history methods. To his list might be added current British projects such as the research into the motivations of Access students being conducted by Mary Lea and Linden West, and Mary Stuart's investigations into the educational life histories of women who have been socially defined as having learning difficulties.8

As far as I am aware, M-O has not yet been used for substantial educational research, though it has rich research possibilities in this field. The first part of the Spring Directive of 1991 focused on education (subsequent sections posed questions about the uses of reading and writing, and about taking risks), and is appended. It asked Mass Observers to outline their educational life histories and to reflect upon their experiences of education. 'Education' was defined to include lifelong (formal) learning: 'don't forget to start right at the beginning (nurseries? playgroups?) and bring it right up to date with evening classes and adult education if it applies to you'. Panelists were also asked to record their own thoughts about the value of education, and about the present situation of education in Britain.

Responses to the Education Directive from 453 Mass Observers now fill four archive boxes, and range from hand written single sheets to book length educational life histories. Becky Garrett, a volunteer in the Archive, has performed an invaluable service for subsequent researchers by profiling Education Directive respondents. She has established that the Directive had a comparatively low response rate (41% of panelists). The gender balance of the 453 respondents - 345 were women and 108 were men - roughly matches that of the panel as a whole. A higher proportion of male respondents were in the older age brackets (two-thirds in their 60s or 70s), while the women were more evenly spread out in the 30 to 80 age span, with the highest proportion in their 60s. The south east of England had the highest geographical representation (28.1% of women and 37.12% of men), but most other regions were reasonably well represented. It is very difficult to ascertain the ethnic background of Mass-Observers, as to date such information has not been gathered or collated. Nor is there an occupational or class breakdown of the Education respondents, though Garrett has established, for example, that about a quarter of the male respondents were graduates.9 Using the computer database of Mass-Observers which is currently in preparation (for the moment it only includes female observers), it will be possible to contrast the profile of Education Directive respondents with that of Mass-Observers in general, and with the British population as a whole.

Becky Garrett has also produced a document which summarises the educational life history of each respondent under the categories of pre-school, infant and junior school, secondary school, further and higher education, and adult education. She notes that there is 'a good deal of overlap and there remains considerable work in classifying "grey areas", for example, extra-curricular activities during school years... and the variety of different forms of education subsumed under "further/higher" and "adult". These last two categories need to be more precisely broken down in future analysis'. Despite such reservations, the summary sheets are an invaluable short cut into the life histories, and suggest the range and richness of the life history material as a source for research about adult education and learning (I will provide a summary sheet handout at the conference).

Using the Education Directive
The Mass-Observation educational life histories might be used in the following ways for adult education research (other fields of education will have additional issues and concerns) :

1. to pose underlying theoretical and methodological questions, such as:

* how do people remember and articulate their educational life histories, and what are the factors influencing that articulation (writing for M-O, the nature of the Directive, the age, educational background, occupation and gender of respondents)?
* who responded to this directive and why (influential factors as above), and how does the profile of respondents compare with that of Mass-Observers in general, and of the British population as a whole?
* what if anything is special or distinctive about the educational experiences and attitudes of respondents (compared with the results of national quantitative or questionnaire surveys), and to what extent can any differences be attributed to the selective nature of the sample, or to the contribution of qualitative life history evidence which highlights the perspectives of adult learners (and non-participants)?

2. to explore specific issues about the nature of adult education and learning:

* how are the nature and values of different educational stages perceived?
* what are the relationships between school experiences and post-school education (or non-participation)?
* what are the motivations for participation or non-participation?
* what has been the take-up and significance of different forms of post-school education (higher education, vocational training and continuing professional education, liberal adult education, so-called 'leisure classes', distance learning, informal learning ...)?
* what is perceived or defined as 'education' or 'educational', and how might the wording of the Directive have shaped those definitions?
* what has been positive or negative about adult education experience?
* what factors facilitated or hindered participation in education at different life stages?
* what have been the varieties of educational pathways and learning routes?
* what have been the outcomes of adult education?
* how have particular educational experiences shaped attitudes to contemporary issues, including contemporary education policy?

3. we might also consider responses to those questions by specific groupings of respondents: men compared to women; different occupational groups or social classes; graduates compared with people without formal educational qualifications; regional distinctions; age cohorts - younger as opposed to adult respondents.

4. we could chart changes in educational experiences, over time and for different age cohorts: for example, how was the education of the generation which grew up in the 1940s affected by the war, and how has that experience influenced their subsequent attitudes to, and experiences of, education?

5. or we could focus on the processes and changes in individual educational life histories, charting the changing interconnections between social and educational contexts, motivations, needs and experiences (we might even go beyond the Directive responses to produce an additional Directive, or to interview a number of respondents in more detail).

A Workshop Case Study

In this session at the conference we will visit the Mass-Observation Archive and see how the life history material has been generated and arranged, and will then use a selection of materials - including handlists, directory responses and Mass-Observers' autobiographical statsements - for a hands-on workshop discussion about the research issues and potential of such material. The session will thus provide conference visitors to Sussex with a unique opportunity to explore and use this internationally renowned archive of 'ordinary people's' autobiographical writings.

Notes

1. For a summary of conservative criticisms, see Paul Thompson, The Voice of the Past: Oral History, Oxford University Press, Oxford, 1988, pp, 68-71, and his editorial in Oral History 18, 1, Spring 1990, p. 24. For the Australian debate see the 'Oral History: Facts and Fiction' exchange in Oral History Association of Australia Journal 5, 1983-84, passim.

2. See the 'Popular Memory' issue of Oral History 18, 1, Spring 1990; the revised discussion of memory and subjectivity in Thompson, The Voice of the Past, 1988, pp. 150-165; the debates in the International Journal of Oral History 6, February 1985; the international anthology edited by Raphael Samuel and Paul Thompson, Myths We Live By, Routledge, London, 1990; and my own adaption of these ideas in 'Using Memory Biography to Explore Masculine and National Identities: an Australian Case Study', in Valeria Di Piazza (ed.), Memory and Multiculturalism, Papers from the VIIIth International Oral History Conference, Universita degli Studi di Siena, 1993. For similar developments in the United States see David Thelen, 'Memory and American History', Journal of American History 75, 4, March 1989, pp. 1117-1129; and Michael Frisch, A Shared Authority: Essays on the Craft and Meaning of Oral and Public History, State University of New York, Albany, 1990. For Australia see John Murphy, 'The voice of memory: history, autobiography and oral memory', Historical Studies, 22, 87, October 1986, pp. 45-54. For ways in which psychology has also taken on these ideas, see David Middleton and Derek Edwards, Collective Remembering, Sage, London, 1990.

3. Oral History 17, 2, Autumn 1989, p. 2.

4. Alistair Thomson, Anzac Memories: Living With the Legend, Oxford University Press, 1994.

5. Dorothy Sheridan, 'Writing For.... Questions of representation/representativeness, authorship and audience', Unpublished paper, University of Sussex, 1993.

6. Dorothy Sheridan, 'Writing to the Archive: Mass-Observation as Autobiography', Sociology, 27, 1, February 1993, p. 28. See also Dorothy Sheridan, '"Ordinary hardworking folk?"; volunteer writers in Mass-Observation 1937-50 and 1981-91', Feminist Praxis 36/37, forthcoming 1993; Dorothy Sheridan (ed.), The Tom Harrison Mass-Observation Archive, A Guide For Researchers, University of Sussex Library, April 1991.

7. Paul F. Armstrong, Qualitative Strategies in Social and Educational Research: The Life History Method in Theory and Practice, Newland Papers Number 14, University of Hull School of Adult and Continuing Education, 1987.

8. Mary Lea and Linden West, 'Telling Stories: Autobiography and the Changing Selves of Adults in Higher Education', Uses of Autobiography Conference, Cambridge, July 1994; Mary Stuart, '"How was it for you Mary?" Reflecting on Educational Life History Work With Women With learning Difficulties', SCUTREA 1993.

9. Becky Garrett, 'Analysis of Panel replies to the Spring 1991 (Part 1) Directive, personal experiences and attitudes towards education, Report of Work in Progress', Unpublished paper, Mass-Observation Archive, University of Sussex, 27 May 1992.

WHOSE STORY, WHOSE TERMS? SOME PROBLEMS OF REFLECTIVITY IN LIFE HISTORY RESEARCH

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Introduction

There are important issues to be explored about the nature and scope of autobiographically reflective practice. For example, what to include of the personal history and self of the researcher in studies of life history given that autobiography and personality intimately shape research practice; and, more specifically, how to interpret the research relationship at either at a one to one or at a larger group level. I am thinking of emotional and unconscious dimensions, alongside and within differences of power, status and knowledge, which may shape the researcher's behaviour and relationship with the researched.

My experience, and a scan of the literature confirms a growing consensus in life history and other forms of qualitative research over this (as confirmed, for example, in many of the papers for the Conference), is that reflective practice is a prerequisite of good research. There is the necessity of understanding self as researcher, one's impact on others and the nature of the research relationship if research practice is to be properly understood. The intense, personal autobiography which this implies demands in turn a commitment to personal awareness and openness which must create anxieties: about what to share, for example, of the historical, cultural and psychological influences on one's motivation and practice.

Such frankness about self as researcher is, on the whole, absent from research accounts. Cartesian dualism: the detachment of the academic from the personal, the objective from subjective, subject from object, remains strong in the social sciences. It remains a risk to work autobiographically, to acknowledge the importance of the personal and the self within the research process. The separation of analyst and object is the linchpin, the fundamental rationale as Woolgar puts it, for science itself (Woolgar, 1993). To argue differently is to challenge a central mythology within academic culture.

There is also no agreement on to how to conceptualise and analyze the personal and self in research. Psychoanalysis, for example, has helped me make sense of some of my practice at both a personal and professional level. But, however eclectic, post-Freudian and object-relational (and thus compatible with cultural and historical forms of analysis), this remains a highly contentious set of discourses (I use the plural deliberately). Postmodernists, for example, regard the subject as merely another position in language. Frosh summarises a postmodernist perspective in which '*...the text is just itself, with nothing behind it...Instead of the self, producing its symptomatology as a compromise between underlying impulses and surface necessity, there is the random emission of desires, isolation of the present from the past and the future, schizophrenic intensification of each moment as it passes as something completely immediate, intensely exciting and devastatingly unreal*' (Frosh, 1991). Psychoanalysis is simply another web of 'fictive' meaning, another rhetorical device. Within the feminist literature, there are major disagreements about the potential contributions of different academic disciplines to theorising the subjective and relational (see Flax, 1990 for a discussion of some of these issues).

Yet, despite these problems, reflexivity within research remains essential to good practice: what is required is a more inclusive, developed theory and practice of how to do it and on what terms. Usher reminds us (this is the positive contribution of postmodernist thinking) that research is a social act of 'knowledging' (Usher, 1994). Two or more people are, in this view, constituting a world, or world-making to use his phrase. I suggest we need to know about the researcher's influence, consciously and unconsciously, in making these worlds within and beyond the text.

However, like others, I worry about how best to analyze my own motivation and behaviour, the influence of my autobiography in research and the nature of interaction in research at an emotional and unconscious level. I am concerned too about storying others, about leading subjects into feeding back what it is they think, consciously or otherwise, I want to hear. Such concerns have been prominent throughout a recent study of motivation and life histories in which I was centrally involved. It is helpful to outline more specifically what I mean as well as my disappointment in the existing reflective practice/adult education literature which fails, as I see it, to address these issues in any detailed way.

Motivation and Life Histories

For the last two years I have been working on adult student motivation using autobiographical, case study methods. This project, alongside other events in my life, has had a major effect on my thinking about self in research and the world-making process. The research involved six semi-structured interviews with a sample of 30 adult returners over a period of eighteen months. The students had enroled in Access programmes. The sample included both sexes, a range of occupations, social and ethnic groupings, ages and educational backgrounds.

During the interviews students explored many areas of their life including previous educational and other childhood experiences; the influence of significant others; family relationships and occupational history. The idea was to allow students to consider - in depth - events and times in their lives which might be significant in their intention to pursue higher education. Students were encouraged to tell their story in their own way while we, the researchers, were to interpret and theorise the material dialectically. The rationale is close, in certain respects, to grounded theory (see Strauss and Cohen, 1990). Ideas were to be shared with the students as the research relationship developed and space found for reflecting on the process as a whole, including our relationship with them.

The starting point, based on the literature, was to conceptualise students as socially marginalised (see Hopper and Osborn, 1975), on the boundaries between different sets of relationships, affiliations and values, uncertain of where they belonged or who or what they wanted to be. Educationally, they were caught in the middle: neither progressing to higher education first time round, or, as for the majority of people, socialised out of the system completely. They would likely have experienced some educational success which, for cultural or personal reasons, was aborted. They might also be struggling with issues of self identity at times of change in their lives (see Courtney, 1992). The decision to enter higher education was an attempt to resolve some of the inner conflict and confusion, often under the influence of significant others who may, for example, have chosen the education route themselves.

Reflectivity was at the heart of the research design. Six in-depth interviews provided space and opportunity to explore in a supportive, empathic and dynamic context the reasons for a decision to enrol in a programme as well as to reflect on the research process. We initially used a check list covering obvious aspects of life history such as education, relationships, employment, work, experience of post-compulsory education and the role of significant others but the interviews gradually established a distinct identity, dynamic and reflective quality of their own.

Students often described how particular events had led them to realise there to be gaps or unresolved frustrations in their lives, particularly in their sense of self. They would examine how experiences in relationships, having small children or employment had filled these gaps, however inadequately. They would describe growing feelings of emptiness and lack in their own identity as situations changed, children left home, they were made redundant or a marriage disintegrated. For many, feelings of emptiness and low self-esteem reached back into earliest childhood memories.

Every interview began with time to reflect on the previous one, in particular the feelings surrounding what had been explored. There were constant reminders that nothing need be said, that the process could end at any time, for whatever reason. The researchers, personally and collectively, interrogated their own assumptions and practice. Initially a shared diary (I kept a personal diary throughout) was used to reflect on issues raised at a personal, intellectual and process level. The method proved problematic not the least given the difficulties of open dialogue in the unequal power relationship between a contract researcher in a temporary post and a tenured academic (see West and Alexopoulou, 1992). Subsequently, in a different research team, regular meetings were used to focus on specific tapes and transcripts as a basis for mutual interrogation. Sharing feelings and more personal insights remained problematic throughout, partly because of different ways (psychoanalytic and ethnographic) of conceptualising student stories.

The research, as indicated, raised questions about my own motivation as a researcher. Why was I interested in this topic, in the idea of reconstituting self and in the nature of the story telling and relationship in research? A particular case study illustrates some of these issues, my own struggles to make sense of what might be happening including the intertextuality of story telling.

'Brenda' is a conventional middle class, middle aged returner. Children leaving home and a husband ever more dominated by work meant change, time, space and the need, as she saw it, for a new role. She told her story, at first, from the perspective of a wife and mother. There were hints of major problems in her marriage which were glossed over with embarrassing asides and blushes. Defence mechanisms were in play: strong feelings seemed just beneath the surface however. At first, they stayed there because they threatened a long established identity, an ingrained sense of loyalty and a precarious ego.

By the fourth interview Brenda had begun the first year of a degree programme, while the story she told was more that of a student as well as of a stronger more independent person which may have enabled some of the anger towards her husband to surface:

> *...I am trying to get myself heard and our language isn't the same. And I think that's where we'll never meet in the middle, we can't because that's Brian and that's me, you know.*

When you say language... you...?

> *I think... Brian is a very logical, very factual person, as I've said before. I'm not saying that's wrong. We need factual people, we need people to deal with logic, absolute logic in the commercial sense, in the numerical sense. He's a bit of a technocrat. Now I can't...I suppose I'm creative... I don't know... I daren't say I'm creative because Brian is creative in a way, in his way.*

> *Yes. He's like a peacock and I hate it and it isn't that I'm not saying that we all haven't got our own social places, because we have, every single one of us. I'm different to people outside to what I am with people in the home. There are times when I get impatient with my mother, when she asks me a question and yet, if somebody else outside asked met the question, I'd say "Oh yes, can I help you" . So you see....but what is*

> *worrying me about the degree is I can see me actually pulling away. I don't know where it's going to lead.*

Strong feelings like these, and the extent of openness, raise inevitable concerns as well as ethical questions for the researcher. I wondered if Brenda was strong enough yet to cope with what was happening not the least because I felt the research itself was encouraging her to be more explicit about her feelings and thus to redefine her identity. Was the new found positioning as a student and learner sufficient to see her through as she reassessed her past and present life in this explicit way? In comparison with therapy, the research gave no long term support. There was no space in which feelings and underlying issues could be worked through over time. Our relationship was finite, I would soon be gone.

As it happened Brenda was also in therapy, and space was available to explore and resolve some of the emotional and self definitional questions further. Indeed some of the issues emerged in the research precisely because of the therapy and the opportunities provided to explore her life and relationships in a supportive space. In other instances students were more isolated, without support. I wondered and worried if six interviews was too many, risking surfacing feelings long repressed which could not then be handled. People are unused to being listened to, to being empathised with, to being given space. Dams may burst uncontrollably as a result.

Revisiting childhood is a powerful emotional as well as intellectual experience. Alice Miller provides some of the reasons:

> *For the child, this repression was necessary because otherwise he would have died from the overwhelming pain. However, adults need not die if they decide to become conscious...this becomes possible when we feel the strong emotions we had to repress in childhood in order to survive, when we take them seriously, clarify their meaning and learn that our pain and rage are justified.* (Miller, 1993).

I was transfixed, and emotionally involved, when Brenda talked of a childhood spent appeasing warring parents, and having to play 'mother' to a highly needy, and probably narcissistic, mother (a theme which has continued into the present):

> *My mother was very protective with me and over anxious. Always worrying about things, I could never ever find my own space, my own freedom because she was always over anxious. But at the same time, she wanted me to get on, she wanted me to be a physiotherapist. That came about because I used to massage her back from the pain when she had a headache - she said I had a nice touch. The quarrels...She is EXTREMELY manipulative, very so much so, and still is...And so the responsibilities of managing my parents, who wouldn't talk to each other, and I had to carry messages back and forward, living in this sullen atmosphere, all violent, very rarely happy or free...*

I told her that I was an only child caught between warring parents and had a childhood dominated, at least in part, by a loving but narcissistic mother. And, like Brenda, I was in therapy. We talked, as Winnicott and others have noted, of how a child has to work hard to meet other's needs in such circumstances as Brenda's, to gain and retain attention and affection. The struggle to do so can cause long term damage to a child's self esteem. We shared stories, sometimes after the tape was switched off and puzzled together about questions of meaning.

The empathic, dynamic collaboration carried us along; after she had gone, and in the quiet of diary writing, I worried about how much I had said; about how I might have shaped the story telling, consciously or unconsciously. Had I used my own experience and position of power and authority to take the tale in particular directions? If so did this matter, was it a strength or weakness? Should I celebrate the fact of common experience making it possible to talk in detailed, explicit ways, or not. However naive these were the issues I wrestled with in my diary.

At other times the research relationship was a puzzle of a different kind. Brenda would constantly ask if she was giving the answers I wanted to hear, apologising for her story and her self. This can no doubt be explained in obvious ways: the workings of power, knowledge, status and gender difference. But this did not sufficiently explain the intensity of feeling at times in the session, positive and negative, on mine and Brenda's part. There was, and is, no final way of knowing but I wondered about transference in which emotions from critical relationships earlier in life, and mainly from childhood, are introjected into the relationship with someone in the present. She felt at times like a child and maybe I was seduced into the role of responsible father. I mused at length on these issues in my diary.

A major issue that seems to be raised in this example is the need for some kind of supervision, modelled perhaps on the lines of therapeutic practice, for the life history researcher. Such research is not therapy and seeking to maintain the boundary is of critical importance. But doing so is difficult as many people welcome the opportunity to talk. Dominice has suggested that life history researchers need specific forms of training to cope with some of these factors (Dominice, 1994).

I looked to my experience as a client in, and a student of, psychoanalysis for some of the answers finding little or nothing in research textbooks or the reflective practice literature. Understanding the role of defence mechanisms was important if the well-being of the other was to be paramount: to know when to ask questions and when to be quiet. Indeed silence itself is problematic in that it can be seductive: people feel obliged to fill the space with stories they may later regret. As to what to share of my autobiography and the danger of shaping the story telling, I chose an open and collaborative path, as I perceived it. But this can so easily, given power differentials, lead to others being storied, consciously or unconsciously.

Concepts of transference (and, among others, Kleinian notions of splitting, projection and projective identification; see Hollway, 1989 for an account of using these concepts in analyzing group discussion) began to clarify for me why interviews may be such a powerful affective, as well as confusing, experience. Finally, there is the issue of what to share autobiographically in writing about research, in writing about me in this process, as one example? I am taking risks here, as was Brenda in her story telling. The codes and conventions are uncertain in such multi-disciplinary company. It would be easier to retreat into emasculated, sanitised, rationalised safety except ragged edges are the basis for our individual and collective growth.

The Literature of Reflective Practice

I found most of the literature on reflective practice to be disappointing. More questions were begged than answered. The literature is useful in delineating the case for reflective practice but there is little practical guidance on ways to deal with personal, emotional and unconscious factors. Giddens, for example, as a sociologist, has identified reflexivity in all human activity as an essential element of survival in a world of constant flux in which traditional societies, meta-narratives and belief systems have either broken down or are sites of fierce contestation. *'The reflexive project of the self...consists in the sustaining of coherent, yet continuously revised biographical narratives'* in a context of multiple choice as received wisdoms lose their hold (Giddens, 1992). The point Giddens makes applies to research too; these are transitional times where notions of science and how to proceed (indeed science itself) are deeply problematic.

But these critical observations about the collapse of meta narratives and consensus remain at a general cultural and analytical level. They offer little help by way of specific advice on the practice of reflectivity. There is also a danger, as Schuller has noted, '*...that the old image of rational economic man (sic) will be followed by a modern image of rationally reflexive people making conscious decisions in the personal sphere, while most of us are still to some extent prisoners of unrecognised influences from the past, and of the myriad social and economic pressures...*' (Schuller, 1994). The constraints and destabilising effects born of the unconscious, as well as the material and structural, seem to be missing.

In the adult education literature, there is a similar tendency to reduce reflexivity to a kind of academic research project ie testing theory at a number of levels in the fire of practice. Bright, for example, using the writings of Schon and Argyris on the reflective practitioner, identifies three types of theory in use: the conscious and public, the conscious and private and the unconscious and unknown. The latter are considered crucial in the design of action in professional practice and need presumably to be identified.

However, there are problems in constructing the unconscious and unknown in this way. Unconscious influences do not appear susceptible to translation into applied theory with the sense of intelligibility which this appears to imply. Whichever language or conceptual framework one chooses - whether conflict ridden drives for pleasure, power or individuation, or, as in object relations theory, the protection and preservation of the ego - the unconscious is a domain of drives, wishes and inchoate potential. We can only guess about its existence and influence through dreams, images and experiences in relationship. Moreover, the language of theories in use, with its rationalist undertones, appears to offer little space for intuitive and affective ways of knowing or understanding in research and professional practice.

We are left stranded, requiring new ways to develop self awareness and reflectivity. Part of the self can be understood by reference to history and culture as with the gendering of identity; part perhaps through examining the texts we produce; but also by reference to relationships, in childhood most of all, and the feelings as well as thoughts which surround them.

Some Questions

This paper begs many questions. I wonder whether uncertainty and doubt about the process of reflective research - of what to cover autobiographically, about one's possible role in shaping others' stories, of how to explain and be aware of unconscious factors in research as well as the problematic boundaries between therapy and research - are shared by others? Can psychoanalytic discourse contribute, alongside postmodernist deconstructionism and feminism, to the development of a more open and reflective culture? Is a form of supervision needed, similar to the practice in psychotherapy, when undertaking life history research? Above all can we withdraw from the battlements of academic tribal behaviours by acknowledging what is repressed and problematic in all our storying and thus create a more inclusive community of reflective practitioners?

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THE INFLUENCE OF SOME LIFE EXPERIENCES ON THE PERCEIVED VALUE OF ACTION LEARNING SETS IN THE DEVELOPMENT OF PERSONAL AND MANAGERIAL SKILLS IN A HIGHER EDUCATION ENVIRONMENT.

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Introduction

The current literature on management and the manager's role or tasks in organisations is littered with statements about the ever increasing challenges that such people have to face, that trying to manage in an organisation today is like battling through and being able to absorb and respond to "permanent white water" Vaill, (1989) He goes on to suggest 9 characteristics of modern managerial leaders job:

More accountability,
More need for leadership.,
More emphasis on team work,
More intense involvement with people,
Greater ambiguity of authority,
Greater emphasis on one's individuality,
More involvement of the whole person,
More stress,
A new mix of an intellectual and action orientation.

There are number of possible paradoxes amongst this list such as emphasis on individuality but more teamwork, ambiguity and perhaps less authority for managers yet managers often expect power and authority. Given this scenario in the economic and political world it raises questions about what is taught in business schools and how such matters are conveyed to students to best enable or empower them to manage such apparent chaos. At Wolverhampton Business school the postgraduate/MBA programme has attempted to provide students in some areas of work with some "learning tools " that are based on the philosophy "that any effective system for management development must increase the manager's capacity and willingness to take control over and responsibility for events and particularly for themselves and their own learning "(Pedlar, Burgoyne, Boydell 1986)

Although a variety of methods have been employed this paper concentrates on the use of action learning sets which are described in greater detail later. The use of such techniques is based on the philosophy, principles and views of self directed learning and the adult learner (Brookfield 1985; Knowles 1990; Tennant 1988; Hammond & Collins 1991) and on the principles of the experiential models of learning (Kolb & Fry, 1975; Kolb 1984; Honey & Mumford, 1983) and on an andragogical approach to the teacher-learner relationship. This inevitably assumes a readiness and willingness of the learners to participate in such activities. Learners come with a range of educational life experiences and expectations, a number of differing, possibly contradictory objectives for taking the course which can mitigate for or against the perceived value of action learning sets. This research has set out to explore some of those life experiences and their impact on action learning sets.

Action Learning and Action learning Sets.
A term coined and expounded by Revans R. since his work with the then national Coal Board in the 1950's and with other national and international companies and governments since that time. It involves a group of people working together for a concentrated period of time on "real problems in real time " (Revans) it focuses on learning and implementing solutions. It is a form of learning by doing but as Revans (1980) suggests this description is not sufficient it is more a form of " learning to learn by doing with and from others who are also learning to learn by doing". These groups or sets are designed to enable the members to take the time to reflect on their past experiences, seek ideas to make sense of events and help to find new and possibly more effective ways of behaving in the future. Revans uses a formula to summarise learning sets i.e. L= P+Q. (learning = programmed knowledge + questioning insight). (IFAL document 1994). The small group in which the learner is located is intended to provide challenge and support.

At WBS the sets are used on programmes for part time and full time students. They form part of a series of 3 modules at the various postgraduate levels which are based around the disciplinary area of "Organisational Behaviour" and seek to develop students understanding of the behaviour of individuals, groups within organisations and organisations as a whole. At the same time they attempt to provide the opportunity to reflect and identify the students own style, behaviour and approach i.e. to develop some self awareness, self knowledge and skill improvement as well as take on board the theoretical body of knowledge associated with the area. Assessments include the writing of a skills analysis and development portfolio, critical incident reflection, development of a case study of an organisation. The portfolios also require students to comment and reflect on the learning set process.

Much of the literature on action learning sets and their usage indicate that such sets are usually managed by a set facilitator who acts as a process director, however there are examples of self facilitated sets (McGill & Beatty, 1992) and for a number of reasons that is the model that WBS follows i.e. the students are responsible for managing the roles, the rules, the timing and the dynamics of group working themselves including asking for tutor help when required.

In higher education the line between group working and action learning sets is not always easy to draw, the differences lie in the fact that with group working the tutor usually sets a specific task e.g. a case study to be resolved. On the other hand action learning sets require students to define for themselves the specific areas of knowledge and skill they will investigate within the broad framework of the module, they can also define the means or method that investigation will follow, again only given the guidelines of the assessment as the final outcome.

Action learning sets then can by their very nature be woolly, amorphous animals. For some students who prefer very black and white, steps to passing the module such sets can be an uncomfortable experience. Revans, himself, suggests that action learning sets always begin in an atmosphere of "risk and confusion" getting students to accept this with their concern that such risk could lead to failure is an issue for the staff.

For many students, however, the experience turns out to be a fruitful and positive one in the end and it was in an attempt to discover what factors in the life histories of such students make action learning sets a positive or negative experience that this research was started.

Methods:
I shall outline here the various tools which are being used to draw out the these factors although it is not the intention to describe here all the methods in depth nor is it possible to provide full analysis of all the results. Instead the intention is to ask the audience to consider some of the methods and results in the spirit of exploration and questioning as to gaps or alternatives.

The research involves a mixture of quantitative and qualitative data. The quantitative includes a biographical questionnaire, the Honey & Mumford(1983, 1986) Learning Styles Questionnaire, the Self Directed Learning Readiness Scale (Guglielmino & Guglielmino, 1975) (SDLRS hereafter) and a specially designed end of module evaluation form. The qualitative material comes from descriptions of the learning set experience drawn from their portfolios and at the moment a limited number of interviews conducted with a specific group of overseas full time MBA students with the aim of reviewing their culturally bound educational experiences as a possible influence on their perceptions of action learning sets. The overall sample currently stands at approximately 60 students, however it is an on going process and more data can be gathered from these and other students. Each of these measures tries to identify different facets of the lives and perspectives of the students. For the purposes of this paper I shall take just this group of overseas students and draw out some findings from their interviews, their SDLRS and their biographical questionnaires. The biographical questionnaire asks for information concerning their formal qualifications type and where taken, any training that has taken place within their organisations for whom they have worked and asks them to comment on the quality, style and relevance of all these various learning experiences. Using the concepts which underlie the SDLRS i.e. that of the self directed learner being someone who " chooses or influences the learning objectives, activities resources and priorities ......" (Guglielmino, 1977) the biographical questionnaire also asks about projects, work or leisure ,they have undertaken on their own initiative. The SDLRS research suggests that those with an above average or excellent score tend to perform well in their job, they tend to be more creative, holistic thinkers, more intellectually active and high life satisfaction scores, high on self esteem and score highly on measures of independent judgement, curiosity for learning and low on dogmatism and dependence measures. The interviews were very broadly structured around the underlying themes of the 4 dimensions of cultural differences as suggested by Hofstede G. (1980) i.e. that of individualism -collectivism, power distance, uncertainty-avoidance and masculinity -femininity drawing on their past educational experiences, how they were taught, how that compares with their experiences at Wolverhampton, how they reacted to authority at work, the role of the family and the cultural differences in lifestyles that they could highlight between Wolverhampton and their own area in order to draw out with these hooks their reactions to working in learning sets. Although some tentative analyses are presented here, it is in the area of "best method" of analysis of such free flowing interviews that I would appreciate the audiences' comments and experiences.

Findings
9 students participated in the interviews, of which 8 had actually participated in the action learning sets. These 8 represent Chinese, Uganda, Spanish and British born Asian cultural influences. The 2 from Uganda were from different tribes, one with public sector work experience, the other with private sector. These 2 interviews will be used to illustrate the type of material being produced. Comments on how more effective use of such material can be made would be welcome.

1. Ugandan, early 30's public sector work experience a first degree and a Ugandan diploma in Business Studies completed in 1987 which he found to be of a satisfactory teaching quality and relevant to his job. He scored above average on the SDLRS measure. He demonstrated a strong preference for a reflector and pragmatist learning styles His comments on the learning sets in the portfolio assessment were positive overall, that there was a relaxed atmosphere, active listening, constructive criticism a review process enabling him to address managerial/personal skill development issues but that pressure from other assignments on other modules caused the set to be less committed as the module drew to an end. The interview indicates the following themes: that the educational system developed from the British model was similar to the family system of obedience to authority figures overall, that the teacher was the knowledge provider and questions/debate was not sought, however the workplace in this case a bank required a more co-operative collective approach . The Ugandan's more relaxed view of time and this person's own lack of skill in time management was considered an issue in managing the course as a whole and the learning set meetings. He found the WBS approach to study a little too relaxed and student centred in the beginning. He now considers that the power held by senior managers in Ugandan is too great .

2. Ugandan late 20's 1st degree and postgraduate diploma completed in Uganda the latter completed in Uganda in 1989 to a satisfactory standard that was relevant to his job. He had an average score on the SDLRS and a very strong preference for a pragmatist style of learning. In evaluating the course his conclusion is that after the first lecture being "completely disillusioned as to what the....module would be ... it plays a very big role in my studies...at least been able to realise the importance of self improvement as a means to organisational improvement". His comments on the group reflect those of Ugandan 1 who was part of the same group. His interview revealed that he had been to USA for 3 months and India for 1 month. Again he reiterated the reliance in the education system on the teacher as expert, the pedagogical model, you are taught to pass exams, the professors word is final and little exchange of views takes place but the education system was rocked by a major change under the Amin Government whereby education and intellectualism was devalued and teaching staff had "no place in society". His personal preference was for the more interactive style noted at WBS. A prominent theme for this person was that of teaching mixed cultures and how you manage the group dynamics of this. His experiences in training computer operators of mixed tribes and religions had led him to explore this area, as well some observations he made concerning his company's Board of which he was a member and how the tribal interplay affected the way the Board operated. This theme of managing groups and learning from groups was important to him, particularly the culturally different perspectives even between himself and his fellow Ugandan, as he returned to it in discussing the action learning set itself, in that he described their set as more of a "sharing community", which was also the underlying comment in comparing the general Ugandan culture with that of the UK, the idea that in Uganda " if you move into a neighbourhood right everybody around in the neighbourhood has to know who is coming" unlike his experiences of the UK.

Final Thoughts:

To suggest any firm conclusions from these brief outlines of the way the research is progressing is difficult, suffice to say that there seems to be a panoply of personal and cultural factors within the student groups participating in these learning sets. For those coming from abroad much of what they expect or are given will be met I suspect with a sense of adventure as the whole experience is new and different. To quote one of the Chinese interviews "I think that maybe that wait and watch then take risk (a Chinese approach) but things are different here, the experience is all new so why not take risk". With further investigation some trends or factors that can inhibit full involvement may come through. In trying to develop a model of possible factors, however, the concept of adventure could be of value and the interviews do indicate that previous experience of working in groups and/or an interest in effective group working, i.e. a background at some point in their lives of co-operative working or a personal belief that team work has merit can provide some of the framework for a beneficial outcome for the student.

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